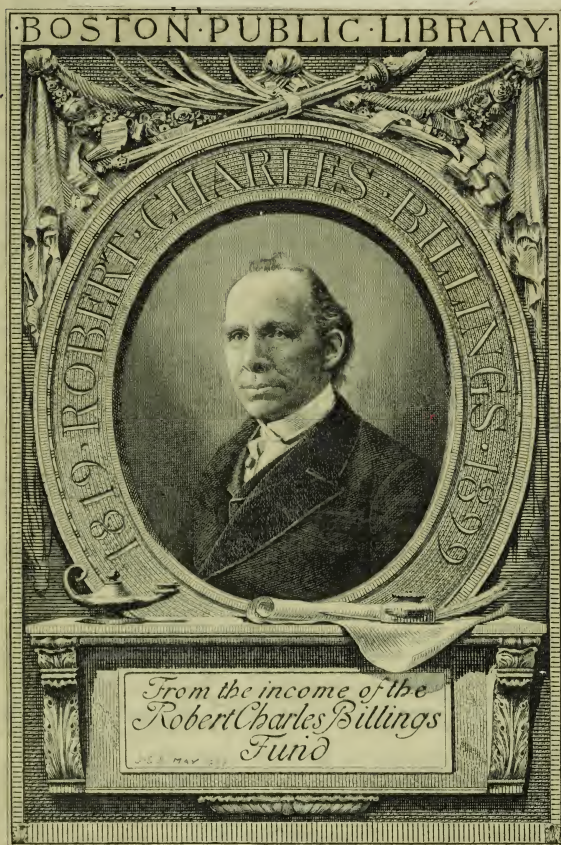






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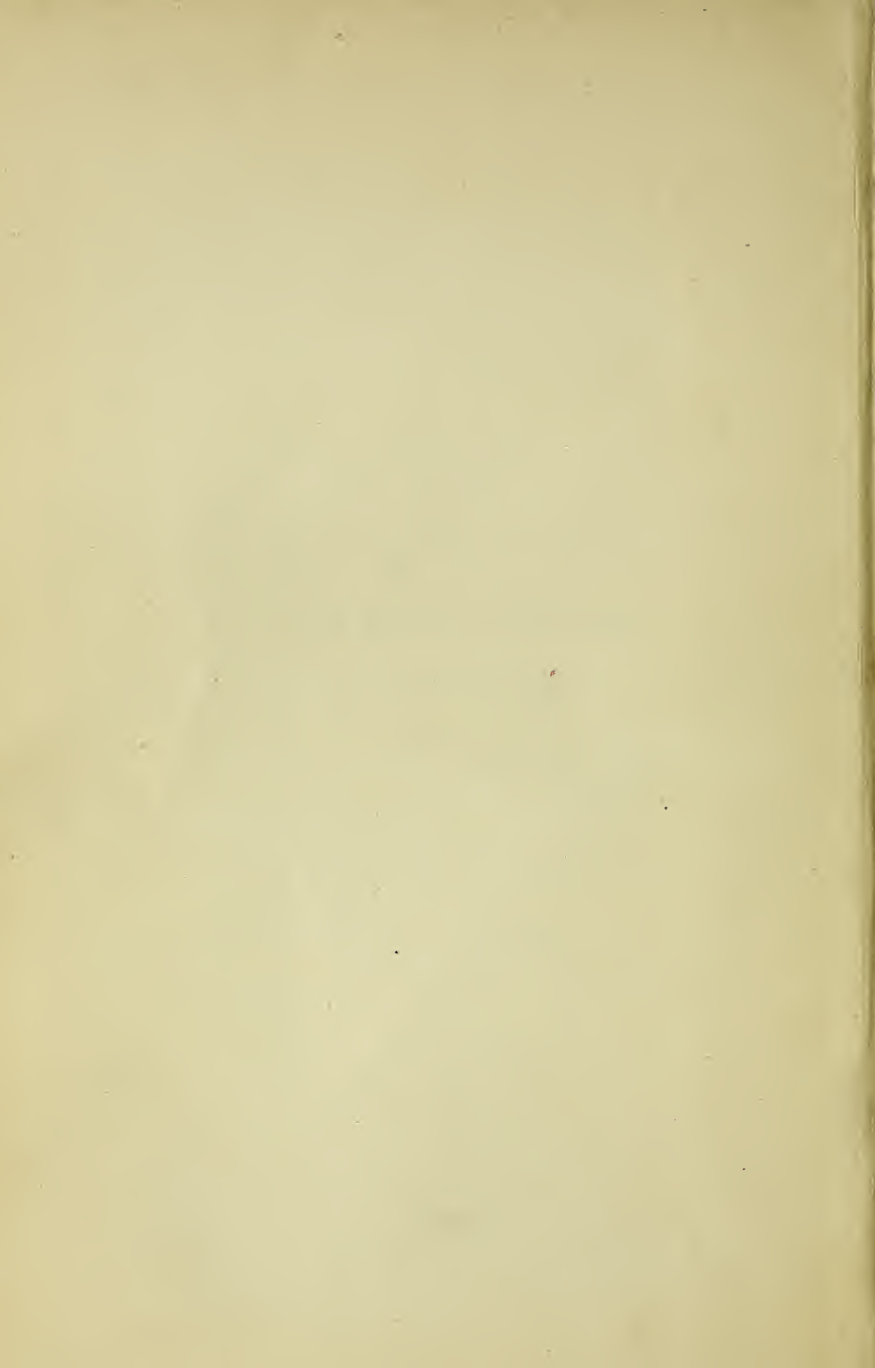
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GRACE O'MALLEY

PRINCESS AND PIRATE



GRACE O'MALLEY

PRINCESS AND PIRATE



Told by

RUARI MACDONALD

REDSHANK AND REBEL

*. . The Same Set Forth . .
in the Tongue of the English*

BY

ROBERT MACHRAY



CASELL AND COMPANY, LIMITED

London, Paris, New York & Melbourne

1898

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Mar. 13. 1922
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WILLIAM L. BROWN
JUN 10 1922
BOSTON, MASS.

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GRACE O'MALLEY,

PRINCESS AND PIRATE.



CHAPTER I.

SAVED FROM THE SEA.

It has now become so much a matter of custom—after that familiar human fashion which causes us to turn our faces to the rising sun—to praise and laud the King, James the Sixth of Scotland and First of England and Ireland, in the beginning of whose reign over the three kingdoms—to which he has been pleased to give the name of Great Britain—this chronicle is written, that there would appear to be some danger of a wonderful truth being forgotten.

For there can be no doubt that his Highness follows upon a most remarkable age—an age which must be known throughout all time to come as the Age of Great Women.

And when I think upon Elizabeth of England, who broke the power of Spain, of Mary of Scotland, whose beauty and whose wickedness were at once the delight and the despair of her people, and of the

French queens, whose talents in statecraft have never been equalled, I make bold to deny that the period of the rule of his Highness will be in any respect as glorious as that which immediately preceded his time, and in which these great women lived.

Now, whether it was from the influence and inspiration of these high and mighty exemplars, or because it was born of the pith and marrow of decreed circumstance, and so lay at the very heart of things, that women should then lead the way, and that men should give themselves up entirely to their service, I cannot say. Yet I know that there were other women of less exalted rank than those I have mentioned, whose powers, although displayed on but a small stage, were seen to be so superior to those of men that men willingly obeyed them, and lived and died for them—and living or dying were glad indeed.

And the story which I have to tell is the story of such an one.

It was my lot, for so had Destiny cast out from her urn the shell on which my name was marked, that I, Ruari Macdonald, of the Clandonald, of the family of the Lords of the Isles, both of the Outer and the Inner Seas, having been unnaturally deprived of my home and lands in Isla, should have been saved to become the servant of that extraordinary woman called, in the tongue of the English, Grace O'Malley.

It is also not unusual for her to be spoken of by them as the "Pirate Princess," and the "Pirate

Chieftainess of Galway," and there have been some who have described her as a "notable traitress," and a "nursing mother of rebels." But to us Celts, and to me in particular, her name can never be uttered in our own liquid speech without something of the same feeling being stirred within us as when we listen to the sounds of soft music — so sweet and dear a name it is.

It is true, perhaps, that its sweetness has rather grown upon me with advancing years. Be sure, however, there was a time when her name uplifted my heart and made strong my arm more than the clamour of trumpets and all the mad delight of war. But it seems far off and long ago, a thing of shadows and not more real than they. And yet I have only to sit still, and close my eyes for a space, and, lo, the door of the past swings open, and I stand once more in the Hall of Memories Unforgotten.

Now that the fingers of time fasten themselves upon me so that I shake them off but with fainting and difficulty, and then only to find them presently the more firmly fixed, I think it well before my days are done to set forth in such manner as I can what I know of this great woman.

I say, humbly, in such manner as I can.

For I am well assured of one thing, and it is this—that it is far beyond me to give any even fairly complete picture of her wit and her wisdom, of her patience and her courage, and of those other splendid qualities which made her what she was. And this, I fear, will still more be the case when I

come to tell of the love and the hate and the other strong stormy passions which entered into her life, and which so nearly made shipwreck of all her hopes, and which in some sort not only did change her whole course but also that of her country.

And, first of all, must I declare how it was that I, Ruari Macdonald, a Scot of the Western Isles, came to have my fortunes so much bound up with those of Grace O'Malley. In the ordinary circumstances of a man of my birth there would have fallen out nothing more remarkable than the tale, perhaps, of some fierce fighting in our Highland or Island feuds, and that, most probably, would have circled round our hereditary enemies, the Macleans of the Rinns of Isla. But thus was it not with me, albeit it was to these same ancient foes of my tribe that I owe my knowledge of Grace O'Malley.

Well do I recall the occasion on which I first heard her voice. In truth I was so situated at the time that while other recollections may pass out of my mind, as assuredly many have passed away, the memory of that never will.

"Do not kill him, do not kill him!" said a shrill treble, piping clear and high above the hard tones of men's voices mingled together, and harsh from the rough breath of the sea.

"Throw him into the water!" cried one.

"Put him back in the boat!" cried another.

"Best to make an end of him!" said a tall, dark man, who spoke with an air of authority. And he made as if to draw his sword.

"No! no!" cried the shrill treble. "Do not kill him. See, he is only a little boy, a child. Give him to me, father."

There was a burst of laughter from the men, and the shrill treble, as if encouraged, again cried, "Give him to me, father."

"What would you do with him, darling?"

"I know not, father, but spare him. You promised before we set out from Clew Bay to give me whatever I might ask of you, if it was in your power. And now I ask his life. Give him to me, father."

There was a silence for a short space, and I opened my weary, fear-haunted eyes, gazing dazed and distracted about me. Then I saw a small, ruddy-cheeked, black-haired maid on the deck of a ship, while around her and me was grouped a band of sun-browned, unkempt, and savage-looking sailors, clad in garments not very different from those of my own people. In the midst of them was the man whom the maid addressed as father. I, the little boy, the child of whom she had spoken, was lying bound at her feet.

My mind was distraught and overwhelmed with the terror and horror of what I had already undergone. Hungry and thirsty, and bruised and sore, I cared but little what might happen to me, thinking that death itself could hold no greater suffering than that I had just passed through. But the sight of the maid among these men of the sea awoke my boyish curiosity. As I gazed at her, a

great wave carried the vessel up on its crest, and had she not put forth her hand and caught me by the thongs of deer with which I was bound, I would have rolled like a helpless log into the hissing waters.

"See," she said, "he is mine."

"Then be it so," her father agreed, after some hesitation. "And yet, it may not be well. Do you understand our language?" he asked of me.

"Yes," I replied. I knew the Irish tongue, which is almost the same as our own, in which he addressed me. For there was much traffic between the Scottish Islands of the West and the North of Ireland, where many of my own clan had settled, the "Scots of the Glens" of Ulster. So I had heard Irish spoken frequently.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I am Ruari Macdonald, the son of Tormod Macdonald of Isla," I answered, but with difficulty, for my mouth was parched and my tongue swollen.

"I know the breed," said he, with a smile, "and the Clandonald are men who may be trusted. Besides, you are but a boy."

He stooped down and cut away my bonds. I tried to stand up, but only fell half swooning upon the deck.

"Water, water!" cried the shrill treble. "He is fainting from thirst." And the voice seemed to keep my consciousness from ebbing utterly away.

Then the maid in another instant was wetting my cracked and thickened lips from a silver cup, and I drank and was refreshed. Next she brought me food and a little Spanish wine.

"Let him eat and drink," said she, "so that his life may be whole within him again."

Taking me by the hand as soon as I had sufficiently recovered, and followed by her father, she led me to the poop of the ship, where there was a sort of cabin, or "castle," as it is called.

"Now, Ruari Macdonald of Isla," said the man, who was evidently the commander of the vessel, "tell me how 'it was that you came to be on the wide sea, lying bound and nearly dead, in that small boat we picked up an hour or so ago?"

"The Macleans," I gasped, for speech was still a burden to me. But before long my tongue was loosened, and I told them all I knew of what had happened.

"The Macleans," said I, "of the Rinns of Isla, who were ever our foes, but with whom we had been at peace for a long time, suddenly set upon and surprised my father's castle by night. I was awakened by the sounds of clashing swords and the death shrieks of men and women—the most fearsome cries—so that my blood ran cold and my heart stood still."

I stopped and choked as I spoke. The maid nodded kindly, and put her little hand in mine.

"Although I had never seen a fight," continued I, "I had been told often and often of battles, so I guessed at once what was going on. I got up from my couch, and in the darkness called my mother's name, but she answered not. I was alone in the chamber. Terrified, I shrieked and sobbed. Then the room filled with smoke. The castle was on fire. Making the best of my way to the door I was clasped in my mother's arms. She carried a lighted torch, but I came upon her so sharply that it fell out of her hand and was extinguished.

"'We are lost,' she wailed, pressing me wildly against her bosom, while I could feel her heart beating fast and hard against my own.

"'What is it, mother?' I asked; but I knew without any words from her.

"We were standing in a corridor, but the smoke soon became so dense that we could no longer endure it. Hardly knowing what she did, I think, she dragged me along to a window in the room where I had slept, and opening it, looked out. The yard of the castle was alive with men holding blazing sticks of fir, and flames shot up from the burning door of the central tower in which we stood. I also looked out, and noticed dark, silent forms lying prone upon the ground.

"'Fire or sword? What matters it?' I heard her whisper to herself. 'Lost, lost, lost! Oh, Ruari, my son, my son!' And she kissed me—the last kisses she ever gave."

I broke down weeping. The little hand of the maid caressed and soothed me.

"We had been spied from the yard," I went on, after I had had my fill of crying, and a great hoarse voice rose above the din.

"Fetch me the woman and the child alive!" was what it said.

"It is Red Angus Maclean," said my mother, hopelessly.

"Then four clansmen plunged through the smoke and flame, and burst in upon us. Seizing us roughly, they took us half dead to Red Angus.

"Do what you will with me," said my mother, falling on her knees before him, 'but shed not the blood of the lad,' she implored and prayed of him. 'He has never done you any harm.'

"He scowled at us, and played with the handle of his dirk.

"Why should I not slay ye both?" said he. 'When did ever a Macdonald spare a Maclean, tell me that?' He paused, as if in thought. 'But listen,' he began again. 'Choose you,' said he, speaking to my mother, 'for such is my humour, choose you, your life or the boy's.'

"Thank ye," said my mother. 'Never did I think I should live to thank a Maclean. Swear you will not shed his innocent blood, and I shall die gladly.'

"Have ye chosen?" said he.

"Will ye swear not to put him to the sword?"

"Yes," said he, and glared at her.

“‘Ye have chosen,’ said he at length.

“‘Yes,’ said my mother; and with her eyes fixed on me, she fell beneath the stabs of his dirk; but even as she fell I sprang from the arms of the men who held me, and leapt like a wild cat of Mull straight for his throat, but he caught and crushed me in his grip.

“‘Remember your oath!’ cried my mother to him, and died.

“Seeing that she was dead he laughed a terrible laugh, so empty of mirth and so full of menace was it.

“‘Ay, I shall keep my oath,’ said he. ‘No drop of his blood shall be shed. But die he too must, and so shall this accursed brood be destroyed from off the face of the earth. Bind him so that he cannot escape,’ he ordered.

“And they bound me with strips of tanned deer-skin, even as you saw when I was found in the drifting boat. Then he spoke to two of his men, who carried me down to the beach, and threw me into the bottom of the boat. Getting themselves into another, they towed that which I was in some two or three miles from shore, until, indeed, I could hear the struggling of the waters made by the tide, called the ‘Race of Strangers.’ And then they left me to the mercy of the sea.”

“How long ago was that?” asked the maid.

“Two days ago,” I replied. “I drifted, drifted with wave and tide, expecting every moment to be swallowed up; and part of the time, perhaps, I slept,

for I cannot remember everything that took place. And then you found the boat, and me in it," I added simply.

"Tis a strange story," said the maid's father; and he turned away to see to the working of the ship, which was straining and plunging heavily in the swell, and left us two children to ourselves.

I looked at the maid, who had been so tender and kind.

"Who are ye?" I asked timidly.

"I am Grace O'Malley," said she proudly, "the daughter of Owen O'Malley of Erris and of Burris-hoole in Connaught—he who has just gone from us."

And then she told me of herself, of her father, and of her people, and that the ship was now returning to Clare Island, which belonged to them.

"See," said she, "pointing through a window in the stern, "there are the headlands of Achill, only a few miles from Clare Island," and I looked out and saw those black ramparts of rock upon which the ocean hurls itself in vain.

"Now Clare Island comes into view," she continued, and peeping out again I beheld the shoulder of the hill of Knockmore looming up, while beyond it lay a mass of islands, and still further away the mountains on the coast.

"All this," said the maid with a sweep of her hand, "and the mainland beyond, is the Land of the O'Malleys."

"And is the water also yours?" I asked, attempt-

ing a boy's shy pleasantry, for so had she won me from my grief.

"Yes," replied the maid, "the water even more than the land is ours." And she looked—what she was, though but a little maid—the daughter of a king of the sea.

CHAPTER II.

THE PRINCESS BEGINS HER REIGN.

TEN years, swift as the flight of wild swans winging their way southward when the first wind of winter sweeps behind them, passed over our heads in the Land of the O'Malleys; nor did they pass without bringing many changes with them. And yet it so happened that no very startling or determining event occurred till at the very close of this period.

The little maid who had saved me from the sea had grown into a woman, tall of stature and queenly in carriage—in a word, a commanding figure, one to be obeyed, yet also one who had the gifts which made obedience to her pleasant and easy. Already she had proved herself in attack by sea or assault on shore a born leader, brave as the bravest man amongst us all, but with a mind of larger grasp than any of ours.

Yet were there times when she was as one who sees visions and feeds on fantasies; and I was ever afraid for her and us when I saw in her face the strange light shining through the veil of the flesh which spoke of the dreaming soul.

But more than anything else, she possessed in perfection a woman's power to fascinate and charm. Her smiles were bright and warm as the sunshine, and she seemed to know what she should say or do in order

that each man should bring to her service of his best. For this one, the ready jest, the gay retort, the laughing suggestion, the hinted rebuke ; for that, plain praise or plain blame, as she thought suited the case. She understood how to manage men. And yet was she at times a very woman—petulant, unreasonable, and capricious. Under the spell of passion she would storm and rage and scold, and then she was ill to cross and hard to hold. For the rest, she was the most fearless creature ever quickened with the breath of life.

I have heard it asserted that Grace O'Malley was wholly wanting in gentleness and tenderness, but I know better. These were no lush days of soft dalliance in the Ireland in which we lived ; the days were wine-red with the blood of men, and dark with the blinding tears of widows and orphans. The sword, and the sword alone, kept what the sword had taken. And yet was she of a heart all too tender, not infrequently, for such a time.

Chiefly did she show this gracious side of her nature in her fond care of her foster-sister, Eva O'Malley, who had been entrusted when a child, a year or two after my arrival at Clare Island, to Owen O'Malley by a sub-chief who governed one of the islands lying off the coast of Iar-Connaught.

Never was there a greater contrast between two human beings of the same kin than there was between those two women : Grace—dark, tall, splendid, regal ; Eva—fair, tiny, delicate, timid, and utterly unlike any of her own people.

Clay are we all, fashioned by the Potter on His wheel according to His mind, and as we are made so we are. Thus it was that, while I admired, I revered and I obeyed Grace O'Malley—God, He knows that I would have died to serve her, and, indeed, never counted the cost if so be I pleased her—I loved, loved, loved this little bit of a woman, who was as frail as a flower, and more lovely in my sight than any.

Men were in two minds—ay, the same man was often in two minds—as to whether Grace O'Malley was beautiful or not; but they were never in any doubt, for there could be none, of Eva's loveliness. Howbeit, I had said nothing of what was in my thoughts to Eva; that was a secret which I deemed was mine alone.

For myself, I had grown to man's estate—a big fellow and a strong, who might be depended upon to look after ship or galley with some regard for seamanship, and not to turn my back in the day of battle, unless nothing else were possible.

Owen O'Malley had received me, the outcast of Isla, into his own family, treating me as a son rather than as a stranger, and, although I never ceased to be a Scot, I was proud to be considered one of the Irish also. Under his tuition I learned all the ways and customs of his people—a wild people and a fierce, like my own. So far as Connaught was concerned, these ten years were for the most part a time of peace among its tribes, and thus it was that I came to know like a native its forests and mountains, its rivers and

lakes, and the chief men of the O'Flahertys and Burkes and O'Connors, whose territories marched with those of the O'Malleys on the mainland.

But I learned much more, for Owen O'Malley taught me how to steer and handle a ship so that it became a thing of my own—nay, rather a part of myself. He also gave me my knowledge of the coasts of Ireland, and there was scarcely a bay or an inlet or a haven, especially on the western shores, into which I had not sailed. And as he proved me and found me faithful, he himself showed me the Caves of Silence under the Hill of Sorrow—strange, gloomy caverns, partly the work of nature and partly of man, once the homes of a race long perished, of whom no other trace now remains. With the exception of Grace O'Malley, from whom he kept nothing hid, and himself, no one but I was aware of the entrance to them and of what lay concealed within.

It had been the habit time out of mind of the O'Malleys to take toll of all shipping in these waters, and to make raids from their galleys upon unfriendly tribes living along the coast. The fishermen who came over from Devon, and who paid tribute according to the number of their smacks, went unmolested; but the merchant trader was ever thought to be a fair prey. Thus, except in winter, when storms tied up O'Malley's ships in the harbours of Clare or Burris-hoole, Owen's three great galleys were constantly at sea.

After I had reached manhood it was usual for Owen himself to be in command of one, Grace of the

second, and myself of the third. It was one of these expeditions which brought about an event that changed the course of our lives.

We had sailed southward, and were standing out one night late in spring about three miles from the northern shores of Kerry, on the watch for any trader on its way to the port of Limerick. The coolness of the night still lay on the edge of dawn under the dying stars, when a fog, dense, dark, and choking, encompassed us around, so that our three ships lost sight of each other and soon drifted out of hail.

Hours passed, and still the fog lay heavy and close. In the afternoon it lightened and lifted and disappeared. There were no signs of our companions. I made my course for a creek at the mouth of the Shannon, where it had been arranged we were to meet in case of any mishap. Towards evening the galley called *The Grey Wolf*, with Grace O'Malley as its chief, came bowling up alongside.

Obedying her summons to go over to her ship, I went on board *The Grey Wolf*, when we exchanged greetings, enquiring of each other if we had seen or heard anything of *The Winged Horse*, her father's vessel. Neither of us knew anything of it, and there was nothing to be done but to await its arrival. We were chatting pleasantly, when I saw outlined against the sunset flaming in the west the bulk of a merchantman, which we guessed from her build and rig to be an English ship, probably from Bristol, coming on under press of sail.

On she came in stately fashion, with her sails bellying out in the fresh breeze, and we could hear her men singing snatches of sailor glees upon her decks. We gazed at her, and then we saw a dreadful and an uncanny thing. Grace O'Malley was the first to speak.

"Look, look!" she said. "What is that?"

My eyes were fixed on the ship, but I could not tell what it was that we saw.

"I know not," I replied. "Perhaps it is some new device of these English. No; it can hardly be that. What is it, I wonder?"

We stared and stared at it, but could make nothing of it.

"It might almost be a phantom ship, Ruari," she said. "But we see it too plainly and hear the sailors too well for that."

Meanwhile, I noticed that the men in our galleys stood about the bulwarks, rubbing their eyes and shading them with their hands, as if they felt that here was some portentous thing.

This is what we saw as the English vessel drew nearly abreast of us.

On the white spread of the mainsail two huge, gigantic shadows of men seemed to appear, to loom large, to grow small, to disappear, and then to re-appear again.

A sort of awe fell upon us.

"What can it mean?" I asked.

"Wait," said she; "we may know soon enough, for I think it is of evil omen for us."

"'Tis nothing," said I boldly, although I feared exceedingly; "nothing but a trick played upon us by the sinking sun and its shadows."

"Nay, 'tis something more than that," said she.

Suddenly the wind fell off somewhat, and now the canvas of the merchantman slapped against her masts with dull reports like the sounds of an arquebus shot off at a distance.

I saw her name in letters of white and gold—*Rosemary*, and as the way she had on carried her past us, I understood what was the cause of what we had seen. For as she swayed with the movements of wind and wave, we beheld two bodies strung up from the yard of her foremast, swinging to and fro with her every motion, looking, as they jerked up and down, as if they were still alive, struggling and gasping in their last agony.

I glanced at Grace O'Malley, whose face had grown in an instant white and rigid.

"Do you not see," said she, after a moment's silence, "that the poor wretches are Irish from their dress? Thus do these English slay and harry us day by day. Is there never to be an end of this wanton killing of our people?" Then she became thoughtful, and added in a tone of sadness, "My heart misgives me, Ruari; I feel the grip of misfortune and grief."

"Make no bridge for trouble to pass over," said I, and spoke many words of comfort and confidence, to all of which she scarcely listened. Respecting her

mood, I left her, and went back to my own ship, *The Cross of Blood*.

That night, while I was on watch, I heard the soft splash of oars, and presently out of the darkness there came the hail of a sailor from the bow of *The Winged Horse*, as she rounded the point and slipped into the creek where we lay.

Something in the tone of the sailor's voice, more perhaps in the slow drooping of the oars, at once aroused my attention. Without words I knew that all was not well. Where was the chief? There could but be one reason why there was no sign of Owen O'Malley himself. Either he was grievously wounded or he was dead. Hastily I swung myself into the boat of my galley, and made for *The Winged Horse*, which was now riding at anchor about a bow shot away.

Tibbot, the best of pilots and steersmen in Ireland, met me as I clambered up on to the deck.

"Whist!" he entreated, as I was beginning to open my mouth in eager questionings.

"What has happened?" I asked in a whisper.

"The chief has been badly hurt," he replied. "He lies in the poop cabin, bleeding, I fear, to death."

"What!" I exclaimed; "bleeding to death?"

"Let me tell you——"

But I interrupted him sharply.

"I must see him at once," I said, and I made my way to the poop, where, stretched on a couch of skins, lay my friend and master. As I bent over him he opened his eyes, and though the cabin was but

dimly lighted, I thought he smiled. I took his hand and knelt beside him. My anguish was so keen that I could not speak.

"Ruari," said he, and that great full voice of his had been changed into that of a babe; "is it you Ruari?"

"Yes; it is I," replied I, finding nothing else to say, for words failed me.

"Ruari, I am dying," said he simply, as one who knew the state in which he was, and feared not. "I have received the message of death, and soon must my name be blotted out from among the living."

As he was speaking there was a rustling in the waist of the ship, and Grace O'Malley stood beside us.

"Father, father," she cried, and taking his head and shoulders on her breast, she crooned over him and kissed him, murmuring words of passionate mourning, more like a mother than a daughter.

"Grace," said he, and his voice was so small that my breathing, by contrast, seemed loud and obtrusive. "I am far spent, and the end of all things is come for me. Listen, then, to my last words."

And she bent over him till her ear was at his lips.

"In the blinding fog," continued he, "we drifted as the ocean currents took us, this way and that, carrying us we knew not whither—drifting to our doom. The galley, before we could make shift to change her course, scraped against the sides of an English ship—we just saw her black hull in the mist, and then we were on her."

The weak voice became weaker still.

"It was too big a ship for us, yet there was but one thing to do. I have ever said that the boldest thing is the safest thing—indeed, the only thing. So I ordered the boarders forward, and bade the rowers take their weapons and follow on."

The dimming eyes grew luminous and bright.

"It was a gallant fight," he said, and his accents took on a little of their old firmness, "but she was too strong for us. In the attempt we lost several of our men, and two were taken prisoners. We were beaten off. Just as the vessels drove apart, and the barque was lost in the mist, a stray shot from an arquebus hit me in the thigh—and I know I cannot survive."

"What was the name of the ship?" asked Grace.

"*The Rosemary*, of Bristol," he replied. It was the name of the merchantman we had seen with the two corpses swinging from the yard of her foremast. "You will avenge my death, Grace, but not now. You must return at once to Connaught, and assemble our people. Tell them that my wish, my command at the point of death, is that you should succeed me in the chieftainship."

There was no sound for a space save only the cry of the curlews on the shore, calling to their mates that another day was dawning.

"Ruari," said the ghost of a voice, "Ruari, I had hoped that you and Grace——"

"But the cold fingers of death sealed the lips of the speaker.

Grace O'Malley fell forward on the stiffening

body; and, thinking it best, I left the living and the dead together. In another hour the three galleys were beating northward up the coast, and on the evening of the second day after Owen O'Malley's death we anchored in the haven of Clare Island, where the body was buried with all the honours and ancient ceremonies paid by the Irish to their chiefs.

Then came the meeting of the clan to determine who should succeed Owen O'Malley, for, according to a law similar to that which prevails among our Celts of the Islands, the members of each sept who have reached the age of the warrior, have a voice in the election of chiefs. As I was not in reality one of themselves, nor could forget that I was a Scot—a Redshank, as the English called me, albeit I could ruffle it on occasion with the best Englishman that ever stepped—I took no part in the council, nor spoke my mind until the older men had said their say.

It was at once a beautiful sight and a memorable, this great gathering, and the most beautiful and memorable thing of all was that men were content, and more than content, that a woman should, for the first time in their history, be called their chief.

When it was my turn to speak, I related what I had heard fall from Owen O'Malley as he was dying, and, without further words, dropping on my knee I took the hand of Grace O'Malley, and swore by the Five Wounds of God to be her servant so long as it might be her will.

Then her people, old and young, pressed about her, calling her their darling and their pride, and thus she became their leader and chief.

But with the death of Owen O'Malley there was an end of the times of peace and quietness in Connaught, whereat, like the hothead I was, I rejoiced, not seeing the perilous adventures that lay before us.

CHAPTER III.

THE TITLE-DEED OF THE SWORD.

“RUARI !”

It was the soft note of Eva O'Malley, calling to me as I came within the gate of Carrickahooley Castle, whither Grace O'Malley, our mistress, had come to fulfil her period of mourning for her father. I had just crossed over from Clare Island on a small sailing vessel, which now lay in the little harbour under the west wall.

“Ruari !”

It was ever a sound of gladness to me, that sweet voice ; and looking up to the chambers of the women, half-way up the front of the great square tower, I beheld the fair face, framed in its pale-gold curls, against the darkness of the embrasure of her window. My heart gave a quick bound of pleasure, and then I grew hot and cold by turns.

For I loved her, and the fear that is born of love made my strength turn to weakness when I gazed upon her. Yet was I resolved to win her, though in what way I knew not. Neither did I hope overmuch up to that time that I understood her, for her manner was a riddle to me.

And here let me set down what were then my

relations with these two women, or, rather, what was their attitude to me.

Grace O'Malley clearly regarded me as a younger brother, and never lost a certain air of protection in her dealings with me. To her I remained always in some sort "a little boy, a child," whose life she had saved—although I was one of the biggest men in Ireland.

Eva O'Malley, who was two years younger than I, had tyrannised over me when I was a lad, and now that I was a man she mocked at and flouted me, dubbing me "Giant Greathead"—I say "Great-head," but in our language Greathead and Thickhead are the same—and otherwise amusing herself at my expense. But in her griefs and troubles it was to me she came, and not to Grace, as might have seemed more natural.

"Ruari!" she called, and I waved my hand to her in greeting. As I went into the hall she met me.

"I was waiting for you," she said, "for I wished to speak to you before you saw Grace."

"Yes?" I asked, and as I noticed the freshness of the roseleaf face I marvelled at it for the hundredth time.

"Grace has made an end of her mourning," she went on, "and her purpose now is to go to Galway to see the Lord Deputy, if he be there, as it is said he is, or, if he be not, then Sir Nicholas Malby, the Colonel of Connaught."

I could have shouted for joy, for I was weary

of forced inaction while the fine weather was passing us by, and all the harvest of the sea was waiting to be gathered in by ready hands like ours.

"Glad am I, in truth, to hear it," said I heartily. I was not fond of Galway, but I was anxious to be again on the waters, and who could tell what might not happen then? There had been no fighting for a long time, and the men were lusting for it, hungering and thirsting for it—only biding, like dogs in the leash, for the word. And I was of the same mind.

"But listen, Ruari," said Eva. "Is it well that she should go to Galway? To my thinking there is a very good reason against it."

"Indeed," said I, surprised. "What is it?" As I have declared already, I had no special liking for Galway—and the sea is wide.

"By going to Galway," said she, "does she not run the chance of putting herself in the power of the English? Is it not to thrust one's head into the very jaws of the lion? The English never loved her father, Owen O'Malley, and the merchants of Galway were never done accusing him of supplying himself from their ships at his good pleasure without asking permission from them."

I smiled, for what she said about the dead chief was true.

"'Tis not well to smile," said Eva, frowning.

"There is wisdom in your words," I replied, becoming instantly grave at her rebuke. "But why not say to Grace herself what you have said to me?"

"Oh, you mountain of a man," she said, "to be so big and to be so——," and she stopped, but I could fill up the gap for myself.

"What have I said?" demanded I, still more abashed.

"Think you not that I have already spoken to her?" she asked. "But she will not hearken."

"Why should she," said I, "care for my opinion?"

"You know she does care," she said testily. "But there is more to tell you."

"More?" I asked.

Her manner now showed the utmost dejection. Her eyes were downcast, and as I regarded her I asked myself why it was that one so fair should have dark, almost black eyelashes—eyelashes which gave a strange shadow to her eyes. Her next words brought me quickly out of this musing.

"The 'WISE MAN,'" said she, "is set against her going. His words are of darkness and blood, and he declares that he sees danger for us all in the near future. I'm afraid—you know he sees with other eyes than ours."

And she said this with such evident terror that inwardly, but not without some dread, I cursed the "Wise Man,"—a certain Teige O'Toole, called "Teige of the Open Vision" by the people, who counted him to be a seer and a prophet. He was certainly skilled in many things, and his knowledge was not as the knowledge of other men.

As she stood beside me, wistfully, entreatingly,

and fearfully, I pondered for a brief space and then I said—

“I will go and speak with Teige O’Toole, and will return anon,” and forthwith went in search of him.

I found him sitting on a rock, looking out to sea, murmuring disconsolately to himself. Straightway I asked him what it was that he had to say against Grace O’Malley’s intended visit to Galway, but he would vouchsafe no reply other than the awesome words which he kept on repeating and repeating—

“Darkness and blood ; then a little light ; blood and darkness, then again light—but darkness were better.”

Whereat I shuddered, feeling an inward chill ; yet I begged of him not once, nor twice, to make plain his meaning to me. He would not answer, so that I lost patience with him, and had he not been an aged man and an uncanny I would have shaken the explanation of his mysterious words out of his lips, and, as it was, was near doing so.

Rising quickly from the stone whereon he had been sitting, he moved away with incredible swiftness as if he had read my thoughts, leaving me staring blankly after him.

What was it he had said ?

“Darkness and blood ; and then a little light !”

Well, darkness and blood were no strangers to me.

“Blood and darkness ; then again light—but darkness were better !”

I could make no manner of sense of it at all ; but I saw the meaning of it plainly enough in the years that followed.

I felt a gentle touch upon my arm, and Eva was by my side.

"Grace wishes you to go to her at once," she said. "O Ruari, Ruari, dissuade her from going."

"I will do what I can," I replied ; but I knew beforehand that if Grace O'Malley had settled what she was to do, nothing I could urge was likely to change her purpose.

Slowly I went into her presence.

"Eva has told you," she said, "that we set out at once for Galway."

"Yes," I answered, "but I pray you to consider the matter well."

"I have considered it well," she replied ; "but say on."

"Is it a necessity," I asked, "that you should go to Galway? Are there not many more places in Ireland for us to go to? Is not the north open to us, and the west, with plenty of Spanish merchantmen and English trading on the broad waters?"

"All in good time," said she, smiling at my eloquence.

"Here," said I, emboldened to proceed, "here you are among your own people, on your own land, and no one will seek to molest us. But in Galway—everything is different."

"That is it," she said earnestly. "That is the very reason—everything is different there."

She stopped as if in thought.

"Listen, Ruari! My mind," said she, "is made up to go to Galway to talk over our affairs with the English governor."

So this was the reason.

"You say I am safe here," she continued, "but am I? Word was brought me only yesterday by a trusty messenger from Richard Burke, the MacWilliam, that my father's old-time enemy, Murrough O'Flaherty, is whispering in the ear of Sir Nicholas Malby, the Colonel of Connaught—perhaps into the ear of the Lord Deputy himself, for I hear he is expected about this time in the city—that my father was an enemy of the Queen, Elizabeth, and that I, his daughter, am sure to follow in his steps."

"Murrough O'Flaherty!" cried I, "is he not content with his own wide lands of Aughnanure?"

"Content," said she. "Such a man is never content! Then this insidious whisperer goes on to hint that I am only a young woman, and that my father has left no heir. It is plain enough, is it not, what he means?"

"Sir Nicholas Malby," said I, "is reputed to be a just man and a good soldier."

"A just man—perhaps, who knows! That is why I am going to Galway. I must make clear my right and title to my father's possessions."

"Right and title," I exclaimed, and unconsciously I placed my hand on the hilt of my sword.

She saw and interpreted the action.

"Our title-deed," said she, "has been that of the sword——"

"And so shall it always be," I broke in.

"In one sense, yes," she assented; "but we live in times of change, and things are not as they were. All the chiefs and lords of Ireland are now getting a title for their lands from the queen. Even my father did something of the sort. If I go not to Galway to put forward my claims it will be said that I am disloyal and a traitress."

"So," I said, "it may be an evil to go, but it is a worse thing to stay here."

"Yes," she answered; "but I have other reasons. It is not that I put so much trust in a piece of parchment, signed and sealed, although I see no harm in getting it. Ruari, I have purposes that reach far beyond Galway, and Connaught even, and for the present I deem it not well openly to incur the enmity of the English."

This speech was beyond me, so I held my peace until I remembered what the "Wise Man" had said; but when I mentioned it she replied that she knew of the matter, and though it troubled her, it would make no difference to her plans.

Then she fell to brooding and thinking, as was her way, whereupon I left her to get the ships ready for sea even as she wished.

So, before another day was passed, the three great

galleys drew away from the shelter of Clare Island, and, speeding before a fair wind, made for the south. Grace and Eva O'Malley were on *The Grey Wolf*, Tibbot, the pilot, was in command of his dead master's ship, *The Winged Horse*, while I was on my own vessel, *The Cross of Blood*.

We took a great company with us of nearly one hundred and fifty men, including a band of arquebusiers, besides bards and pipers, and a priest on each ship. The priests were not much to my liking on shipboard, but Grace would have them. Both Grace and Eva brought of the finest of their garments, all made of rich Spanish stuffs, so that they might appear before the Governor as befitted their rank. I myself took with me two full suits, also of Spanish make, and such as were worn at courts, that I might not appear unworthy of my mistress.

As the wind was steady, the black cliffs of Achill, with the mass of Cusheamcarragh and the dome of Nephin behind them, soon grew distant in our wake. The glowing cone of the Holy Hill of St. Patrick, a wonder of light and shade as beam of sun or shadow of cloud fell upon it, sank behind us.

And on we went through a sea of silence, whereon we saw never another ship; on past the grey or green islands off the coast, until the wind dropped at sunset. Then the rowers bent their backs and knotted their muscles over the oars, and so drove the galleys up the long, narrow arm that is called the Bay of Killery, until we found anchorage under the

mighty shoulders of that king of mountains, the lonely Muilrea.

At early morn, before the sun was up, albeit a far-off, tender flush had sprung up, like something magical, upon the western rim of the world, the dirl, dirl, dirl, and the clamp, clamp, clamp, of the oars, as they smote the groaning pivots on which they swung, was heard, and the galleys went foaming out from the bay, the spray rising like a fine dust of gems from under the forefeet of the ships. Then we caught a breeze, and the sails swelled and drew, while the sailors gat them to their places with shouts and laughter.

Is there any coast in the four quarters of the globe where you will find more splendid havens than in the portion of Ireland lying between the Bay of Killery and the Bay of Galway? Well has that land been named Connemara—that is, the “Bays of the Ocean.” The rugged cliffs, whereon the weather and the wave have combined to throw all manner of cunning colours far beyond power of painter to copy, still less devise, are everywhere broken by inlets, in many of which all the fleets of Spain and of England together might have ridden safely—hardly one of these bays but has its island breakwater in front of it for its protection from the storm and tempest.

’Tis a rare home for seamen!

As the day wore on we fell in with a Scottish ship hailing from Wigtonshire, called *The Lass of Carrick*, going to Galway like ourselves. But Grace O’Malley had given command that until her business was

finished with the Governor, we were to continue peacefully on our course, so we left her without scathe, whereat our men were in no way offended, there being but little profit to be got out of a ship coming from Scotland.

A vessel going back from Galway to Scotland was another thing, for she generally carried a cargo of wines of divers sorts, to say nothing of silks and other valuable materials. Therefore made I a note in my mind to watch *The Lass of Carrick* when we were come to Galway, and to observe what she took away in that broad, ill-built hulk of hers when she left the port.

That night the galleys put in to the Bay of Caslah, the most eastern harbour on that coast, and the following day, without adventure of any sort—so calm a beginning might well have told me what storms there would be before the end—we made Galway.

As had been arranged between us, *The Cross of Blood*, my ship, let go her anchor in the harbour between the mole and the bridge by which the city is entered on that side, while the other galleys stood out some distance in the bay. Sending a messenger ashore, I made known the errand upon which we were come, and, after waiting a long time, received answer that the Lord Deputy was not yet come to Galway, but that Sir Nicholas Malby would see Grace O'Malley, and would give a safe-conduct to her and her guard.

It was now too late for our landing that day, so

we remained where we were all that night. Next morning the three galleys rode within the harbour of the city, and not far from us were *The Lass of Carrick* and several other vessels, all come for the wines and the other merchandise of the great and famous city of Galway.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COLONEL OF CONNAUGHT.

IT was about an hour from noon, a hot sun burning in a blue sky, when Grace O'Malley signified from *The Grey Wolf* that she was about to land, and that it was her desire that I should accompany her, but that I should go on shore before her, to make sure that she would not be detained at the gate. Having made a suitable response to my mistress, I gave command to the rowers and the helmsman of *The Cross of Blood*, and the galley slowly drew up alongside the wall of the harbour, beside the gate by which an entrance is made into the "Street of the Key," as it is called.

Perhaps it was the fierce heat which indisposed to exertion of any sort, but the place was strangely quiet and still. Two or three soldiers, with steel morions on their heads and corselets of iron about their bodies, gazed at us with indolent curiosity from the towers and parapets that looked across the bay.

At the gate itself were an officer and his guard, lounging about listlessly enough in the sunshine, and taking apparently but a little languid interest in our movements. A few sailors of different nationalities, among whom the swarthy Spaniards predominated, and some of the country fisher-folk,

walked about the quay. Not far from us *The Lass of Carrick* was discharging her cargo; below us a fishing smack, with its one great sail set, was being rowed out to sea.

As my galley approached within a few feet of the quay, I heard a whistle, or what seemed a whistle. Indeed, so swift and shrill did the sound bite into the air, that it was as if someone standing close beside me were trying in this fashion, very peremptorily, to excite my attention. At the same time, or, mayhap, a little sooner or a little later—the whole thing, it appeared to me, came together on the instant, as it were—I felt the rush and the wind made by an arrow or a bolt as it flew past my face. Then the crick-crack of the barb, as it smashed and splintered the wood of the bulwark behind me, followed immediately afterwards. Involuntarily, I put up my hand to my cheek.

Death had passed close to me, had almost struck me. Yet, hardly realising what had happened, I stood rooted to the spot. A queer, quaking sob burst from me—the surprise was so sudden, so complete.

My first thought was that the arrow had been intended for me, but I had escaped it by the breadth of a hair, and no more. I was untouched. Momentarily I expected other arrows; but none came. I asked myself what was the meaning of the solitary arrow. At first sight it appeared as if we were about to be dealt with treacherously—that we were being beguiled to our destruction. Evidently, that was the

mind of my men in the matter, for they had made a quick and terrible outcry that we were betrayed when they marked the flight of the quivering shaft.

Holding up my hand for silence, but bidding them take their weapons as quietly and calmly as they could, I waited for what might next befall. Ordering the oarsmen to cease rowing, the galley lay motionless on the water. Looking anxiously up at the parapet, and then at the gate, I could perceive no unusual commotion among the soldiers, nor could I see a bowman amongst them. It appeared doubtful if they had observed that anything out of the ordinary had taken place, and, certainly, they acted as if they had not. It plainly was no affair of theirs—that was sure, for they were not more on the alert than before.

Whence, then, had come the arrow, and for what purpose, if not one of death?

My second thought showed me clearly that, had the mysterious archer intended to kill me, there would have been nothing easier, for, standing as I did on the poop, I was the best mark in the world; nor would he have required any marvellous expertness in his art to have made an end of me. So, as everything about us now seemed favourable and fair for us, I next turned my regard to the arrow itself, which was fast in one of the beams of the galley.

Now for the first time I noticed that it had been shot into the ship in such a way that it was nearly or altogether hidden by the shape of the

vessel from being seen by those on shore; and I bethought me that it must have been sped without hostile intent, but, on the contrary, conveyed some message of warning which it would be well not to neglect. Wrenching forth the missile with an effort from the beam, I examined it carefully, and found, as I had begun to anticipate, a message; for roughly inscribed upon it was the word "Beware!"

With the dark, foreboding saying of the Wise Man still ringing in my ears, it was not likely that I should overlook any measure of precaution that was in my power, but the safe-conduct of the Governor of Connaught had given me a feeling of security—which was, perhaps, not justified. Thus it was that I could not but suspect that the message of the arrow was meant to prevent me from putting trust overmuch in Sir Nicholas—a man whom I had not yet seen.

Instead, therefore, of taking with me only six spearmen, as I had purposed, as part of Grace O'Malley's bodyguard, I doubled the number. Besides these there also landed three gentlemen of her household, chiefs from the islands, men of proved courage, to whom the use of the sword was as much a part of themselves as the breath they drew. I had already sent ashore early in the morning a trusty steward, with instructions to procure two horses for my mistress and Eva O'Malley, and he now, as we made fast to the quay, came forth from the gate with two splendid barbs, each attended, as is usual in Ireland, by its own swift-footed horse-boy.

While our landing was proceeding I could not help wondering who it was that had sped the arrow, and why he had chosen this way of conveying his warning. Manifestly he was one who was afraid, and desired to keep in the background, for reasons that commended themselves sufficiently to him. Rapidly thinking over the affair, I came to the conclusion that our friend could be none other than Richard Burke, the MacWilliam of whom I have already spoken, and who, I had some reason to guess, cherished a tenderness for Grace O'Malley.

And right mightily glad was I to think that one so strong and brave was in Galway at this time. So great was his fortitude and tenacity of purpose that he was quite commonly spoken of as Richard the Iron, and never in the day of adversity was there a stouter heart or a more vigorous arm than his.

But why had he taken—or caused to be taken, as was most probable—this extraordinary method of apprising me of immediate danger, for that and no less I concluded was the meaning of that one word, “Beware”? The future was to show, and that soon enough.

To lay *The Grey Wolf* alongside of *The Cross of Blood* was the work of a few minutes, and soon the two ladies were mounted upon their horses, but not before I had told Grace O'Malley of the incident of the arrow, and asked if she had any further commands to give.

Now, my mistress was possessed of that high and proud sort of spirit upon which the hint of danger

acts as fuel to fire or spur to steed. So she did but cast her eyes over the men I had picked out, and, selecting a similar number from her own ship, said that her purpose was unchanged.

"Tell the officer on guard at the gate," said she, "that I go to confer with the Governor, Sir Nicholas Malby, on affairs of state."

The captain of the gate appeared to be somewhat dazed with the size of our company, which numbered more than thirty swords, spears, and battleaxes, and he arranged his men in a line as we advanced. Saluting my mistresses with grave punctilio, he informed us that Sir Nicholas was lodged at the house of the Mayor of Galway, where for the time he held his court. But, he said, as he stood resting the point of his drawn sword upon the ground, orders had been given to admit into the town only the lady Grace O'Malley, her women, and not more than a few of her people.

When I protested against this, he replied that the Governor was very strict; and as for himself, he was merely a soldier whose duty was to do what he was bid.

My mistress, as he spoke, flashed on me a glance of quick intelligence; then she turned with a brilliant, compelling smile to the officer.

"Sir," cried she with animation, looking with her dark, lovely eyes into the eyes of the Englishman, "you speak as a soldier should. But here"—and she waved her hand round her company—"are not more than a few of my people, as it were. You

think that we be too many? Nay, sir, 'tis not so. Is it not fitting to do as much honour as I can to the Governor? And the more of us the greater the honour done him?"

And she smiled again upon the officer, who was a young man and a gallant, to his undoing. While they were thus engaged in parleying—they conversed for some time, but what further was said I did not hear—we had pressed within the gate and filled up part of the street beyond. Having gained this position, I had no thought of retreating. The captain, noting our bearing, and partly won over by Grace O'Malley's woman's wiles, partly making a virtue of necessity, for we could easily have overpowered his men, again gravely saluted.

"Be it as you wish, lady," he said; and so we passed on up the Street of the Key.

It has been my lot to see of great cities not a few, but, though I had scant reason to love the place, not many, I will say, that were finer or more handsomely built than Galway was in these days. She was now at the very height of her prosperity, and laid claim to be second in the kingdom to Dublin alone, and proudly vaunted her superiority over her ancient rival Limerick.

As we marched up the Street of the Key, the ladies magnificently attired in our midst, and presently entered the High Street, the tall spires of the church of St. Nicholas of Myra—the patron saint of mariners, who hath ever been most favourable to me—rose in front of us; while the storehouses

of the merchant princes of the city—the Lynches, the Martins, the Blakes, the Kirwans, and others whose names escape me—encompassed us with vast buildings of dressed stone on every hand.

On all sides were signs of abundance and wealth. And small wonder; for there was hardly a port of France or Spain—nay, of all Europe—whither the ships of Galway did not go. Her traders, ever unsatisfied, had even sailed out beyond the Spanish Main to the Indies.

But it must be remembered that Galway was not an Irish city, but an English—where it was not Spanish. The strong walls and towers which belted her in were not more for defence against an enemy who might attack her from the sea, than against the Irishry who dwelt beyond her gates. And keen and bitter as was the hatred between Englishman and Spaniard, that between the Englishman of Galway and the Irishman, whose home was in the country, was keener and more bitter still. The day was not to close without a proof of this.

On we passed, making a brave show, with the sun overhead shining on our arms and harness, while the townsmen stood and gaped, and the women looked out at us from their windows and doors. On we passed until we halted before the mansion of Stephen Lynch, the Mayor, reputed to be the richest man in Galway. Here, in front of the house, there was a guard, and I could see through the archway that the courtyard beyond was full of soldiers.

After an exchange of greetings I was shown into

an anteroom, and thence sent word to Sir Nicholas that my mistress was without, and waited his pleasure. After a slight delay, the Governor replied that he was at meat, and that he would think it an excellent omen if my mistress, her ladies and gentlemen, would honour him by their company.

Then, to my surprise, the Mayor himself appeared, helped, with much ceremony, Grace and Eva O'Malley to alight, and invited then myself and certain of our comrades of rank to enter, at the same time commanding that our men should be most courteously entertained.

All this display of friendliness was so different from what I had expected that I knew not what to think. Afterwards I learned that Sir Nicholas had been informed of our numbers, and that this had led him to change the plan that he had originally formed—which I understood was that Grace O'Malley was to have been at once seized and held as a prisoner until he had determined what was to be done in her case—and this notwithstanding the safe-conduct he had given.

Separated as I was by some distance at table from my mistresses, I could not hear the conversation between them and the Governor, who talked to them in a certain bluff, soldier-like fashion. Amongst others present were Sir Murrough O'Flaherty of Aughnacore, Richard Burke of Mayo, and other of the chiefs of Connaught who were known to us. But all my attention was taken up in watching, as carefully as I could, Sir Nicholas Malby, the Governor.

There was no possibility of mistaking him for anything but what he was—the successful soldier of fortune. He had the port of one used to command, and there was a rough dignity about him that became him well. His face was scarred and weather-beaten, and I had heard that he had seen hard service, both in the Low Countries and in Spain. He did not come, I had been told, of any noble or considerable family. His sole possession had been his sword, and he had rather hewn than carved out his path in the world with it.

I at once recognised in him a shrewd and capable man, who would not let many things stand in his way. Here was one, I knew, to be reckoned with. Myself a man who both gave, and therefore expected to receive, heavy blows; he was another of the same sort, and I felt a certain respect for him.

There was told a curious tale of the way in which he had become a soldier—and 'fore God, it is not for me to say I think the worse of him for it! It is never a custom of mine to set down anything I hear to anyone's despite, yet in this instance the story helps show the nature of the man.

In his youth, which was mean and poverty-stricken, he had been arrested, convicted, and condemned to death for coining—so 'tis said, and I understand this to be the truth. In some manner or other—I know not how—he had made interest with one of the great nobles at the English court, and was released on condition that he would enter the nobleman's service as a soldier, and proceed to the

war then being waged against the Emperor. And this he did, acquitting himself so much to the satisfaction of his superiors, that he was soon placed in command of a body of mercenaries, and displayed no little valour at their head.

Later, he had come over to Ireland under Sir Henry Sydney, who esteemed him so highly, owing to the manner in which he had fought against the O'Neils of Ulster, that, when Sir Henry was Lord Deputy of Ireland for the first time, he had advanced him from post to post, until he was now Governor, or "Colonel of Connaught," as his title was.

One thing we had heard, and that was, like all the rest of the English, he was very greedy for money, and that his ears readily listened to an argument that was backed up with gold. Therefore had we brought with us rich presents for the Governor, which were duly delivered to him when dinner was finished.

Such, then, was Sir Nicholas Malby, upon whom the fortunes of my mistress so much depended. I perceived that she was studying him with no less intentness than myself, but that she hid this under a gay and sparkling demeanour.

When the meal was over, Sir Nicholas said that he desired to talk with her alone, and they withdrew together to another room. Whereupon Sir Murrough O'Flaherty and the other gentlemen of the Irish, gathered around me, plying me with many questions, to all of which I returned evasive replies, feeling in truth exceedingly anxious, and wishing nothing so much as to be on board my galley again with my

mistresses safe in theirs. Nor did I have an opportunity—as I desired—to speak privately to Richard Burke.

It was about the middle of the afternoon when Grace O'Malley sent for me and presented me to Sir Nicholas, telling him that I was her foster-brother, and that I was pledged to her service. The Governor scanned me narrowly up and down, then suddenly put forth his hand and grasped mine with a grip of steel. I fancied, and herein I was right, as events subsequently proved, that he had something of the same feeling in regard to me as that I had experienced for himself.

“I have but one desire,” said he, when he had talked for some time, “and that is, the establishment of the Queen’s peace in Connaught.” And he laid his hand heavily on my own. I bowed, but answered not, thinking in my mind that silence was best, for what had we to do with the Queen’s peace; we, who were the free rovers of the sea?

Then it appeared that Grace O'Malley had been asked by the Mayor to be his guest for awhile, and that she had accepted his invitation. So I now learned that my mistresses were not to return to the ships at once, but were to take up their abode in the mansion of the Lynches along with the Governor.

I was none too well pleased with this arrangement, remembering the message of the arrow, but dissembled my fears and suspicions, particularly when I was informed that no objection was made to her keeping her guard. I further gathered from her air

that she was not ill-content with the result of her interview with Sir Nicholas, and that all seemed to be going as she wished.

Anon the Mayor entered, bringing with him his daughter Sabina, a dark, handsome woman of twenty summers, who was to be the hostess of my mistresses, for her mother was dead. And with her in this fair seeming entered also the shadow of Destiny—a shadow not to be lifted for many a day.

It was never given to me to read the hearts of women, nor to comprehend their ways, but, being but a man, I looked upon this woman with pleasure, little dreaming what evil she was to work upon us. Here was one, had I but known it, far more to be feared than the bluff, determined soldier who was Colonel of Connaught.

CHAPTER V.

THE QUEEN'S PEACE.

IT was some three hours or so from sunset when I took leave of my mistresses, both of whom were in the highest spirits. I saw that my young and innocent dear was delighted with her surroundings, and had completely forgotten her objections to Galway. She and Sabina Lynch had at once become friends, and, indeed, it was impossible for anyone to see Eva O'Malley and not immediately to be gained over by her.

But Grace O'Malley had a certain reserve in her talking with the Mayor's daughter—a reserve that sprang from instinct or intuition, or a forecasting of the future, perhaps.

My two ladies had entrusted me with various orders to their women with regard to sundry boxes of apparel to be sent to the Lynch mansion, and as I set off to *The Cross of Blood*, I felt in better humour with myself and the world. Fortune at the moment appeared to smile upon us. Sabina Lynch had told me, just before I bade her good-bye, that her father was to give a revel with dancing—after the fashion which obtained at the Court of Elizabeth, who was immoderately fond, I have heard,

of this form of entertainment—in a few days, in honour of the Governor.

I could see that my mistresses both looked forward to it with keen anticipations of pleasure. At first I could not share in their feelings, thinking that we did but waste our time in Galway, until Grace O'Malley had confided to me, in an aside, that she believed her affairs would soon be settled with Sir Nicholas.

She had declared to the Governor that it was her desire to hold her lands from the Queen, on condition that instead of being bound to supply for her Highness's service so many soldiers when called upon for a hosting, she should maintain her ships and their crews of sailors and fighting men so that they would be always ready to do the Queen's will, whether it was on the western coasts of Ireland or of Scotland. He had not said "Nay," but had put the matter off until he had considered it more fully.

As I was walking down the Street of the Key to the harbour, along with the three gentlemen of our household who had gone with me to the Mayor's, we met a party of half a dozen citizens of the place, all standing talking together. Their voices were raised either in anger or debate, and as we approached I heard enough to understand that they were discussing the action of the Governor with regard to my mistress, and that it met with their strong disapprobation.

"Our ships will never be safe," cried one, as we

came up with them. They made no effort to let us pass, though the street was narrow at this point, and seemed rather as if they intended to dispute the ground with us. The odds were against us, but not too greatly; so saying, "By your leave," I went on.

"Sir," cried I, the hot, angry blood burning in my cheeks, as I returned roughly enough the push I had received from one of those who blocked the way, "sir, your manners stand in much need of mending—or ending."

And my sword—a flash of living fire in the westerling sun—was out in a twinkling.

I knew the fellow who had insulted me. It was Michael Martin, a rich merchant and a person of authority in the town, notwithstanding his comparative youth—he was not much older than myself—to whom I spoke. He had deliberately jostled against me as I made to pass him, and I was never blind to a hint of this kind.

His action, coupled with the words I had heard, had quickly got me out of the happy frame of mind with which I had quitted the Mayor's mansion, and my thoughts were immediately of my mistresses' danger. His unmannerly act meant more than hostility to me.

"Draw!" shouted I furiously, and his sword flashed out at me. Martin was neither a coward nor a poor swordsman, and my hands were full with this business in another instant.

"Manners," quoth he, as our blades rang together

as steel met steel; "manners! Manners, forsooth! Who are you to teach a gentleman of Galway manners? You—the scum of the sea!"

And so he raved, keeping his eyes warily fixed on mine the while.

These fresh insults maddened me like the stirring of venom from the poisonous fangs of a wolf, and a sudden fierce storm of passionate anger such as I had never before felt swept over me, as I cried to him across the darting swords, "We shall see, we shall see!"

Meanwhile my comrades ranged themselves beside me with their weapons unsheathed, and several of those who had been talking with Martin were not slow to follow their example, but it was rather, as it happened, with a view to forming a ring round my opponent and myself, so that we had the fighting to ourselves.

"A brawl, a brawl!" someone cried, and there was the sound of the shutting of windows and the closing of doors.

My position placed me at a disadvantage, for the sun, now sinking downwards behind the hills on the other side of the Bay of Galway, cast its rays in my eyes, and caused me to blink, whether I would or no, as the points of our swords, forming glittering circles of flame, whirled this way and that. I endeavoured to force the fighting so that my adversary would change his ground, but he was fully conscious of how much he gained by maintaining his place, and all my efforts were vain.

Now, as we thrust and parried, lunged and retired, my anger passed away, and I found myself become as cool and collected as if I had been on the deck of my ship. I had successfully met and defeated a stubborn attack, at the same time piercing his breast for a short inch mayhap, so that the blood spurted forth in a little jet, when Martin, saying quickly with a choking gasp,

"Another time, Redshank!" suddenly gave way, much to my surprise, not seeing any reason for his change of front. Surrounded by his friends, he turned swiftly, and in hot haste made off down the street, and, entering a narrow lane not far from the wall, was lost to view.

For one instant I stood, breathing heavily, sword still on guard. Then I was about to follow, when a voice, harsh and commanding, cried: "Halt! Stop! Halt in the Queen's name! Halt, halt!"

I knew the voice, although I had heard it for the first time in my life that very day. It was Sir Nicholas Malby, the Governor himself, and no other, who spoke. I also realised that I had gotten myself into a position of some hazard, to say the least, with one to whom the preservation of the Queen's peace was the principal object of his ambition.

But the Governor was, above everything—so I said to myself—a soldier, and I flattered myself he would understand, and even sympathise with, my feelings in this matter. He was attended but by two of his officers, yet he came up without hesitation,

and the fierce question of his eyes was full of challenge.

"What is this?" he cried. "I will have no brawling in the streets!"

I saluted with great deference, remembering, perhaps rather late in the day, Grace O'Malley's orders that we were to do everything we could to make our stay in Galway a peaceable one, and made bold to say as respectfully as I could—

"Sir, the fault scarcely lies with us"; and I went on to tell him exactly how the affair had been brought about, protesting that I could act in no other way than I had done, as the quarrel had been forced upon me. As I told my story he nodded coldly, but not disapprovingly.

"I am resolved to have an end of all strife," said he; at length, after thinking deeply for a short time: "Can you tell me who was the aggressor?" he asked. "Did you know him?" Then, without waiting for my answer, he continued threateningly, "I will hang any man whom I find disturbing the Queen's peace, be he prince or kerne, chief or gallowglass!"

Now, it was no part of my business to hand over Martin to the mercies of the Governor, and it was very much my affair, I thought, that I should settle my quarrel with him personally, so I made no reply to the question of Sir Nicholas.

"He was a stranger to you, I presume," said he, and was about to pass on, but changing his

mind, he asked whither I was bound and for what purpose.

When I told him I was on my way to the galleys, and with what object, he smiled a little grimly, and walked with me towards the gate. He made many inquiries as to the number of fighting men there were aboard of the galleys, and the manner in which they were armed. I asked Sir Nicholas whether he would not pay a visit to *The Cross of Blood*, but he declined, as it was his custom to make a survey of the walls at this period of the day.

"Your mistress," said he, as he left me at the gate, "is in good hands." And I could not but muse somewhat darkly at this enigmatic sentence.

It was past the middle of the night, when I was aroused by someone coming softly into my cabin. A lantern swung from the beam above my head, and in the half darkness I made out Walter Burke, my chief officer, and with him Richard Burke the MacWilliam. In a moment I was wide awake, knowing that this secret visit of Richard the Iron was pregnant with something evil. Eagerly I looked into his face.

"What brings——!" I exclaimed loudly. But his fingers were placed on my lips.

"Quietly, quietly," said he. "I do not suppose that there are any traitors on *The Cross of Blood*," continued he.

"All staunch, staunch," I interrupted, "everyone."

"'Tis well," said he; "but what I am come to tell you is not a thing to be proclaimed from the tops of our towers."

Stirred by a host of thronging fears, I waited, keenly apprehensive of his next words. They were heavy enough, although the misgivings I had felt had not left me altogether unprepared for tidings of the kind.

"Grace O'Malley," said he, in a low tone which thrilled me through, "is virtually a prisoner in Galway. The Mayor, or rather, I should say, his daughter, has made herself answerable to the Governor for her. While your mistress is apparently free to come or go as she pleases, she is in reality deprived of her liberty, as she will discover if she tries to leave the mansion of the Lynches."

"Grace O'Malley a prisoner?"

"That is what she is," said Richard Burke. "She is not bound, nor is she locked up in a room. Her every movement, however, is watched by Sabina Lynch. While she may think herself a guest, and an honoured guest, the hospitality is a mere pretence."

"But why, why?"

"There are many reasons, as you well know," he replied. "The mind of the Governor is set against allowing any of the ancient customs of the land; he is endeavouring quietly and skilfully—for he is not a blustering bully as some others are—to reduce the power of the chiefs and to make them pay tribute to the Queen. Where he does

show his hand plainly it is always to strike a deadly blow."

"Yes, yes," I said, impatiently. Grace O'Malley a prisoner, and I sitting quietly in my ship! The thing seemed impossible—yet it was true.

"No need for haste," said he calmly. "Listen to what I have to say, and then you will grasp the matter more surely. Sir Nicholas will offer no violence if he can gain his point without it."

"What is his point?" I asked.

"Is there any need to ask?" replied Burke. "Grace O'Malley is a powerful princess in Connaught. She has her lands, her galleys, and several hundred well armed men at her back. Is that not enough? Are the English not trying to clip all our wings? But there is far more in the case of your mistress."

"Go on, go on!" I said.

"This," said he. "The mind of Sir Nicholas has been wrought upon by the merchants of Galway, who are ever about him, saying this and that, offering him valuable gifts and such things as he loves."

"To what end?"

"You know as well as I do, that these proud-stomached folk have no great liking for us Irish," said Burke. "Did you never hear that they have a statute of the town that 'Neither Mac nor O' shall strut or swagger' in the streets of Galway? There has always been, however, a friendship between us Burkes of Mayo and one or two of the families

here, as, for instance, the Lynches, and I hear through them all that is going on.

“Owen O'Malley plundered the ships of the Galway merchants, making scant distinction between them and Spanish or French or Scottish ships. Grace O'Malley shared in many of her father's doings before he died, and the people of Galway think that she has inherited her father's nature and disposition as well as his lands and ships, and that as long as her galleys roam the sea there will be no safety for their vessels.”

The words were nearly the same as those Eva O'Malley had used when she tried to dissuade my mistress from setting out from Clew Bay.

“What would they have Sir Nicholas do?” I asked.

“Break up her ships; scatter her people; hang, kill, burn, destroy them; hold her a prisoner; or—for there is no advantage to be derived from our shutting our eyes—kill her, too, by poison, perhaps, unless she agrees to the terms of the Governor.”

Burke now spoke in great excitement, and with labouring breath; nor could I listen to his words with any degree of composure.

“She will never agree to the Governor's terms,” said I. “She is being deceived, for she believes that Sir Nicholas is favourable to her suit.”

“Put that hope out of your mind,” replied he. “Sir Nicholas is merely playing with her—with what object you can easily guess. It is for no other

reason than to make her ruin the more complete."

I assented gloomily.

"Now we know what to expect," I said. "We are forewarned and so forearmed."

"Your mistress pays no heed to warnings," said Burke hotly.

I thought of the arrow and its message.

"The arrow!" I said.

"Yes," he replied. "I could not send you word openly, so I chose that way, getting one of my men, who is a famous archer, to send the shaft into your ship."

I thanked him warmly, remarking, however, that Grace O'Malley would pay no attention to any warnings whatever, once she was resolved upon any particular course.

"She must be told now of her danger," he said, "and at once."

"I suppose," said I, "I can still see her."

"That I know not," he replied; "but news of your fight with Michael Martin is all over the town, and you will have to walk circumspectly. Sir Nicholas spoke of his meeting with you, and declared that all such conflicts must be severely punished. Go not into Galway—unless with a strong guard."

The counsel was wise, but I was quite determined, if necessary, to disregard it. My mind, however, suddenly went on another tack, and I spoke out what my thought was.

"I must see her, and that without delay," I said;

"but you mentioned that you were friendly with the Lynches. Could not Grace O'Malley be sent a message through them? If the Mayor is not to be trusted, surely Sabina Lynch, his daughter, cannot sympathise greatly with the dark and terrible projects of the Governor. Would she not convey a letter to my mistress?"

Richard Burke looked at me fixedly and searchingly.

"That is doubtful," said he, at length. Then he added, "I do not think that we can place our confidence in Sabina Lynch in anything that concerns Grace O'Malley."

"Why?" I asked simply.

He did not answer immediately, but stopped and pondered awhile before he replied—

"I am about to tell you, Ruari, what I never thought to say to you or any other living soul. But the need is urgent, and I must speak. The Lynches and myself are old friends. I have known Sabina Lynch since she was a child, and I have been made aware in many ways—there is no need to go further into that—that I am not displeasing to her now she is a woman. And her father has as much as intimated that he regards me with eyes of favour."

I saw it all in a minute. Sabina Lynch loved Richard Burke, and Richard Burke did not return her affection. Did Sabina suspect that she had a rival? Did she regard Grace O'Malley as a rival? These questions passed through my mind with the speed of light

"What has Sabina Lynch to do with Grace O'Malley?" I asked.

"I will not conceal from you," said Burke, "that I am not in love with Sabina Lynch, but am in love with your mistress. Once I imagined that it was Owen O'Malley's intention to wed you to his daughter, but neither you nor she has a passion for the other. Is it not so?"

"Yes," I replied. "She is an elder sister to me—I am no more than a younger brother to her."

"I love Grace O'Malley," said he, "with all my soul and with all my strength. I mean to ask her to be my wife——"

I broke in harshly.

"This is no time, surely, to talk of such a matter," I cried, "now when she is a prisoner, and helpless in the hands of people who are her bitter enemies. Rather let us cast about for some means of delivering her."

"I ask nothing better," said Burke, "than to assist you—only remember it is not well to place any confidence in Sabina Lynch."

Then we spent the next hour discussing plans, and having formed one which had some promise of success, Burke left the galley as secretly as he came—his boat disappearing into the darkness of the night.

After he had gone, I tried in vain to sleep, and finding my thoughts but dismal company, had myself rowed over to *The Winged Horse*, where I saw Tibbot, the pilot, whom I informed of the visit of

Richard Burke, and of what we had concerted to do for the deliverance of Grace O'Malley. And as we could not foresee what the next step of the Governor might be, it was agreed that Tibbot's galley should be kept ready for instant action, and to provide against any surprise by keeping her out in the bay, at such a distance that she should be out of the range of the calivers and bombards mounted on the walls of Galway.

CHAPTER VI.

GRACE O'MALLEY DANCES OUT OF GALWAY.

As early in the morning as was possible, without causing remark or exciting suspicion, I went into the town, taking with me several of my own men. The same officer who had been in charge of the guard the previous day was at the gate, and I advanced towards him boldly, as if I had no notion in the world that there could be anything amiss, nor, so far as he was concerned, was there.

For he gravely returned my salutation, merely giving me "Good-day" without waste of words, and waved his hand in the direction of the church of St. Nicholas of Myra.

When I had arrived at the mansion of the Mayor, I could see no difference in the manner of the reception I was accorded, except such as there would be owing to my mistress not being present on this occasion.

I sent in my name, with a request that Grace O'Malley might be informed of my arrival, and after a short time—short as far as the actual minutes, but it appeared an age to me, so impatient and anxious was I—I was conducted into a spacious room, where I found my two ladies, Sabina Lynch, and several gentlemen, most of whom were Irish. They

were in the midst of a conversation as I entered, and I quickly gathered that they were talking about the entertainment the Mayor was to give in honour of the Governor before many days. They were speaking of corantos and other dances, in which I had but small proficiency, and I could not help saying to myself that Grace O'Malley could have no suspicion how slippery would be the floor for her feet!

On endeavouring to get speech with her privately, I found myself completely baffled, and that so subtly and craftily that I raged and fumed inwardly. For when I attempted to draw her aside we were instantly joined by Sabina Lynch, who smilingly disguised her purpose of preventing us from talking together by ourselves under a mock of empty but pleasant words. Indeed, so skilfully and readily did she speak, and with so much apparently of goodwill, that I had constantly to remind myself of all that Richard Burke had told me only a few hours before.

What my feelings were may be guessed, but I did my utmost to conceal them, although not very successfully, as I afterwards was told by Eva O'Malley. I never was one who could play the part of gallant or courtier, and what I knew to be in the wind did not tend to assist me in the efforts I now made to be at my ease and to seem confident that there was not a cloud in the sky

And it could hardly be that one, who had seen so much of me as Eva had, but would observe my

clumsy attempts at gaiety and light-heartedness. What she thus saw in my manner made her very uneasy, but at the time she kept her ideas to herself. It was enough, however, to put her on her guard, and caused her to watch more narrowly whatever was going on.

A couple of hours were spent in this way, and, disturbed beyond measure by reason of my inability even to breathe a word of warning to my mistress—I had resolved to say nothing of their peril to the woman I loved, fearing lest it might prove too hard a trial for her, wherein I misjudged her strength most grievously—I bade them farewell for that day.

As I left I encountered the Governor, who was coming up the street. He reined up his horse, and, after uttering a few courteous words, asked me not to fail to go through the square of the town cross on my way to the quay. He said this with so much curious insistence in his tone that my interest was roused to the quick.

As a man enters this square from the east side the first object which meets the eye is not the town cross, but the town gallows. As soon as I had turned the corner of the street I perceived that from the gibbet there swung in the wind, forward and backward as the breeze rose and fell, the figure of a man. That the Governor had intended me to see this, and that it had some special lesson for me, I did not doubt, so I pressed forward smartly. Yet it was with an amazed horror that I beheld the dead man's face.

For the victim was none other than Michael Martin, my antagonist of the previous afternoon. The Governor had followed the matter up, and had discovered him whom he had called the aggressor in the interrupted duel. Verily was the Queen's peace being maintained with a vengeance. I had read the ruthless character of Sir Nicholas aright. Here, what had been a man, had been tried, sentenced, and executed in a few hours; and that Martin had occupied no inconsiderable position in Galway showed that the Governor was afraid of none.

If he would not hesitate to act in this fashion in the case of one of the English of Galway, how much less would he care for the Irish of Connaught? This I perceived plainly enough was what he desired Martin's death to intimate to me. For myself, notwithstanding what had passed between Martin and me, I was hot and indignant that a man so brave as he should have been put to so foul a death.

It was in a melancholy mood that I bent my steps to the quay, albeit I made a great effort to keep from my face the troubled thoughts of my mind. Not only had I failed in acquainting Grace O'Malley with her real position, but I was also well aware that the hatred with which she inspired the people of Galway would be made all the fiercer by the death of Martin.

Striving to cast aside these sombre reflections as unmanly, and likely only to hamper me in any plan

I might make for the freeing of my mistress, I went on board *The Cross of Blood*. I, at least, was free as yet, and ready to do and dare all. But so far I could not see my way, and had I been left to myself to carry out the device Richard Burke and I had formed, would probably have suffered some such fate as that of Michael Martin.

The next three days passed without any striking event. I had seen my mistress once at the Mayor's mansion, and the attempts I made to reach her private ear were met and checked as effectively as before. I noticed, however, that while she appeared as gay as ever, there was a something about her that suggested in one way or another she was now conscious that she was not at complete liberty.

She had desired—so I got to know later on—to go down to her galley, but obstacles had been put in her path and objections had been raised. Then she had grasped the situation in which she had been placed, but had both the courage and the wisdom not to let this be evident.

It was the fifth day of our stay in Galway when *The Lass of Carrick* cast herself off from her moorings by the quay, and, towed out by her two boats into the bay, made ready for sea. I watched the rich prize slip out of our hands with dismay, but it was my only business at present to stay where I was. Yet, as I noticed how deep the Scottish ship lay in the water, I could not but regret that my hands were tied.

The captain made some signs to me which I

did not comprehend, but which I interpreted as ironical farewells. I was the more mystified when, as I watched her approach *The Winged Horse*, I saw a boat put off from her for that galley. But when the night fell I had every reason to bless and not curse *The Lass of Carrick*. For in the dark Tibbot came on board my ship, bringing a letter from Grace O'Malley, which she had managed through one of her women, who had made love to the Scottish captain, to send thus secretly to me.

Now, the revel which the Mayor was giving for Sir Nicholas was to take place on the next day, and in this letter my mistress, who was now thoroughly awake to her danger and also to the perfidy of Sabina Lynch, set forth her plan of escape. It was at once bold and ingenious, and had a fair prospect of succeeding. That it was not carried out exactly as had been calculated—but this is to anticipate events.

My part was simplicity itself.

My mistress told me to come to the revel, as I had been invited, as if attending revels had been my occupation all my life, and to bring with me as many armed men as I thought could be got safely into Galway. But on no account was I to omit to fetch the two pipers—Phelim of the White Lock (he had an odd-looking tuft of white hair on his forehead) and Cormac, his brother. What they had to do will appear later.

Further, I was commanded to have the galleys ready to put instantly to sea, for the favourable

outcome of the matter depended in the end on the swiftness of our movements.

Having received this letter, my breast swelled with joy. The calm was at an end, I said, and now for the storm; and ever in these days loved I storm more than calm. My spirits rose immediately as this week of wearisome waiting drew to an end and the time of action was at hand.

As soon as the day had come I called my chief officers together, and bade them be ready to sail that night, and I gave a similar charge to those of *The Grey Wolf*. Then I picked out several of the older men, and, for a pretext that they might be admitted into the town the more easily, despatched them with boxes and bales for our mistresses, which they were to carry to the mansion of the Lynches. I also sent a gift to the Governor, in order that he should have no ghost of a suspicion that I knew how matters stood.

In this manner, then, I introduced twenty more of our men into Galway, making up for their absence from the two galleys by causing Tibbot to send me some of his.

To those sent into the town I gave as a common meeting-place at a given hour the tavern that is under the sign of "The Golden Eagle," bidding them thereafter to assemble in the High Street near the Mayor's house. There they were to await my coming with my mistresses, if events should fall out according to our wish, and then, if there should be any need, I should tell them what to do.

At the appointed time I presented myself at the Lynch mansion. Here I found a considerable company was gathered together, many of the chiefs having arrived from the surrounding districts, north and south and east. In the streets was a great throng of gallowglasses and kernes, who had come into the place along with their chieftains.

The scene was one of bustle and movement and confusion. Among the crowd, engaged in keeping some sort of rough order, were a few English soldiers, part of the garrison of Galway. I noticed many of our own men, and as I passed through them I succeeded in telling them to take as little part as possible in any sports or quarrels that might be going on, but to hold themselves prepared to rally to me, and to follow when I should call upon them to do so.

When I entered the large room in which the revel was to take place, I saw Sir Nicholas and his officers standing in a group by themselves, receiving the chiefs and their ladies, as well as the principal citizens of Galway and their wives, as they came up.

Near them were the Mayor and his daughter, who was the centre of a number of beautiful maidens and stalwart young men. The instruments of music were already sounding forth their sweetest strains, inviting to the dance; and Sir Nicholas, making a stiff bow to the radiant Sabina, asked her to join him in a coranto.

The dance ended, many compliments were paid to the pair, although to my mind the Governor had

disported himself like a clumsy bear, such as the Spaniards and the men of the South have to dance for their amusement.

Sabina Lynch, on the other hand, was, I will confess, a stately figure, and as she had been taught the coranto in Spain, where she had been brought up for some years, and so was vastly proficient in it, met with great and deserved attention. Indeed, I heard one of the English officers declare that he had never seen anyone more graceful or accomplished—no, not even at the Court of Elizabeth.

After a brief rest, Sir Nicholas again appeared, now leading forth Grace O'Malley. Although she thoroughly understood what a mockery all this courtesy on the part of the Governor was, she let no sign of her knowledge escape her. She had too great a soul for that; but had she not been cast in this mould of heroes she might, as a woman, have acted just as she did, so that she should give no triumph to Sabina Lynch.

Dance followed dance in quick succession, and both of my mistresses took their full share of all that went on. Both of them appeared to be devoting themselves without reserve to the pleasure of the occasion, and I could not but admire them. My love for Eva O'Malley was quickened anew, if that were possible, when I saw how unmoved she was, and how brave a carriage she kept, despite the fact that she knew they were but prisoners in the hands of the English, and in grievous peril of their lives.

I felt I could not have danced with a halter

round my neck, yet here was this small, delicate woman doing this, and doing it as if she did not see the dangers that threatened her. The body, indeed, was weak, but the heart—how big it was!

Thank God, I say, for the great hearts of women!

I tried to acquit myself also in the course of the entertainment to the best of my ability, but for the most part, being no skilled performer in the matter of corantos and other dances, was perforce compelled to spend much of the time leaning against the wall. Once, as the Governor was passing me by, he stopped and spoke.

"Sir," said he, "I have to render you my grateful acknowledgments for the handsome gift you have sent me this day."

"Sir Nicholas," replied I, "the gift was sent you by command of my mistress."

The cruel, fierce eyes twinkled, and too late I perceived that my thoughtless words were making him suspect that some communication had passed between Grace O'Malley and myself in spite of his efforts and those of Sabina Lynch to prevent it. Thinking to undo the effect of my heedless speech, I made speed to continue.

"I thought," said I, "that had my mistress been on her galley she would not have come to this revel in your honour with empty hands."

"'Tis well spoken, by St. George!" said he. "Yet methinks there be few in Ireland that can afford to be so generous."

The Governor's brow relaxed, then clouded over

again, for, on reflecting on my speech, he saw there was that in it which suggested I was not unaware that my mistress had been debarred from going down to her ships.

"You must reap rich harvests," continued he, after a brief hesitation, "on the coast of Clew Bay, yet am I informed that nothing grows there but rocks."

Howbeit the strains of music, rising and falling like a summer sea, were borne upon the air, and Sir Nicholas moved off to his own place. But his manner made me anxious that what we had planned might not long be postponed.

The hours one by one went by, and the time came.

I saw my mistress, laughter in her eyes and on her lips, approach Sir Nicholas, and enter into a gay conversation with him. I moved up nearer to the top of the room.

"If you have never seen it, Sir Nicholas," I heard her saying, "sure am I you would like to see it."

I listened in painful suspense for the answer of the Governor. Everything depended on it. "Who could resist Grace O'Malley, when she chose to be resistless?" I asked myself. Then I remembered what I had heard and seen of Sir Nicholas, and I replied to my beating heart that here was a man who might resist. But he had no suspicion whatever, and he fell into the trap, baited so cunningly by a woman's wit.

"I have seen it," said he, "and if you will honour me by dancing it with me——?"

"The honour, Sir Nicholas," quoth she, saucily, "is mine."

The matter did not fall out quite as we had hoped, for it had been part of our plan that I was forthwith to have danced one of our wild Irish measures, which are more a test of endurance than an exhibition of grace, with my mistress.

It was soon spread through the assembly that the Governor and my mistress were to dance the dance of the country people, and on this proof of his affability towards us there were loud shouts of approval. Then there was a cry for the pipers, and, presently, just as we had schemed, in strode Phelim of the White Lock, and Cormac, our men—striding along the hall, with their pipes blowing the quick step to a merry and rollicksome tune.

Forward came Sir Nicholas and Grace O'Malley, while the people stood round about in a wide circle. But the Governor was no match for my mistress, and he soon began to hang out signals of distress, whereupon, greatly to his discomfiture, she wheeled about and beckoned to Sir Murrough O'Flaherty, of Aughanure, her bitter enemy, to take his place—displaying in this selection her wonderful craft; for how could anyone suppose—the Governor certainly least of all—that the O'Flaherty was chosen but to throw dust in his eyes?

My mistress danced with gliding, pit-patting feet that never tired, while the applause which greeted

her every motion grew to a wild enthusiasm. Sir Murrough O'Flaherty had to acknowledge himself beaten, and retired. Grace O'Malley now cried aloud to me to come forward, and I stepped from the crowd, my heart beating faster than it had ever done in the day of battle.

"Dance, dance, dance!" cried she to me, and she whirled about like a mad thing.

"Have ye no pity on the pipers?" I exclaimed, with a laugh that rang out, it seemed to me, false and hollow, but I was determined to follow her lead as best I might.

"The feet were never made," said she, as she advanced more slowly towards me and I took up my position opposite to her, and began the steps, "that can out-play a piper."

The company smiled, grimaced, and murmured with delight at her answer, and the pipers, well pleased also, played as they never had played before. And the wild and furious dance went on to the wild and furious music of the pipes. Meanwhile I was watching my mistress with hungry, eager eyes, waiting for her to give the sign.

"Pipe, pipe!" she cried; and again, "Pipe, pipe!" and the playing of Phelim and Cormac was like the roaring of the storm among the trees of the forest.

So the dance went madly on until all the people about us grew quite still and silent, looking on more breathlessly than we who were dancing to that mad music—looking at such a measure as they never had

witnessed before in all their lives, or ever, I dare swear, saw the like of again.

Then came the sign.

Grace O'Malley's uplifted hand slowly dropped to her side as with sheer weariness; the tall, queenly figure seemed to droop, to sway uncertainly, to totter, to fall upon the floor, but even as she fell I had gathered her up in these great arms of mine, and was carrying her through the press towards the chambers of the women.

Eva O'Malley flew to my side, her face full of fear, as it appeared to be. The pipers' music suddenly ceased. But no more I saw or heard of what happened next in the room of the revel.

No sooner had the door of the apartments of the women closed upon us three, than Grace O'Malley slipped from my arms and stood up, her faintness—which had been merely assumed—disappearing at once.

"Quick, quick!" she cried, pointing to a door. "There is the stair! That is the way!"

They stopped, however, for a little, to get a couple of heavy cloaks with which they hoped they might be able to conceal themselves somewhat from curious eyes. Short as the time was which this took, it was enough to permit Sabina Lynch to enter the apartment, and she at once perceived not only that my mistress had recovered in a marvellous brief space, but also what our project was.

"Seize her," said Grace O'Malley, as she and Eva were leaving the room.

I rushed towards the woman, and, clapping my hand to her mouth, prevented her from giving forth the scream she was on the point of uttering. As I was glancing about for something with which I might gag her, and so effectually silence her, my mistress again appeared, and said, her eyes blazing with anger:—

“Bring her with you, if you can; the way is clear.”

“A gag!” I said, and Grace O'Malley made with her own hands one, with which she stuffed Sabina Lynch's mouth, and next she bound the woman's arms. Then I took Sabina Lynch up, and in silence we descended the stair which led us into the street some twenty yards from the main entrance into the Mayor's house.

It was now dark, but not sufficiently so as to hide us completely from observation, and an instant's thought convinced me that carrying a bound woman, as I was doing, it was impossible to go very far without being seen by someone who would instantly give the alarm. Therefore, still keeping in the shadow of the house, I sent forth into the night the O'Malley battle cry, knowing that our men could not be out of hearing; and the sound had not died away when there arose a great noise and shouting.

“O'Malley! O'Malley! O'Malley!” was heard on all sides.

“To me, to me—here!” I cried.

And, in less time than seemed likely, there were gathered about us nearly all our men, but mixed with

them several Burkes, O'Flahertys, and others of the Irish. Recognising their mistress, the O'Malleys set up a joyful sound. Forming some of them in a line across the street, I begged Grace O'Malley and Eva to take with them the rest, and to hasten toward the gate, and this they accordingly did, while two of our people carried Sabina Lynch between them in the same direction.

In the meantime the flight of my mistresses had been discovered. I saw lights flitting about the courtyard, and heard the words of command given in the strident tones of Sir Nicholas, then the tramp, tramp of the feet of the soldiers smote upon the night air.

To have a conflict in the streets of Galway, just at the place where the English were strongest, was not to be thought of, as it was not more foolish than it was unnecessary, so I ordered my men to retreat as swiftly as was practicable towards the gate, and to endeavour to catch up to Grace O'Malley before the gate was reached by them.

But when we came to the gate we found it had already been forced by our chieftainess, who had taken the feeble guard completely unprepared, and so had quietly made an end of them. It was all the work of a few seconds; yet in the struggle, short as it was, Sabina Lynch had effected her escape. Without delay we proceeded to embark in the galleys, and to put out to sea.

While we were engaged in this manner the great bell of the church of St. Nicholas suddenly boomed sharply through the night: soldiers began to appear

on the battlements, torches flared from the walls, and bullets and arrows poured upon us as the galleys drew away from the quay. Some of the shots were aimed so well that two of our people, one of whom was Walter Burke, were slain and several others wounded.

Then, as we proceeded on our way into the bay, the sputtering fire ceased.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DIE CAST.

THAT night I reflected with joy that the die was cast, as, after our breaking out of Galway, there could be no peace between Grace O'Malley and Sir Nicholas—at any rate, until the matter was composed in some definite fashion.

I trod the deck with a feeling of extraordinary buoyancy, and sniffed the salt air with delight as the galleys headed for Inishmore, the largest of the three isles of Arran, which have been thrown for a protection by the hand of God, almost in a straight line, across the entrance to the bay of Galway.

All that I cared for in the world was held in these ships, now speeding over the water under the leadership of Tibbot the Pilot.

It was with deep satisfaction that I went over the events of the evening which had brought us with such success out of the town, and I looked forward with wide-eyed eagerness to the morning when I should meet my mistress, and hear her narrative of all that had passed when she and Eva were prisoners in the mansion of the Lynches.

Eva, who had kept up so bravely while the danger was greatest, had become faint and unstrung when the peril was past. Grace O'Malley would suffer no

one but herself to tend her, and thus I had had no opportunity for conversing with either of them after we had made good our escape.

When we had arrived at the island, and had let go our anchors in a fair depth of water in a small bay, which was sheltered from the full shock of the Atlantic by a range of abrupt craggy headlands, I went on board *The Grey Wolf* to see my mistresses, but Grace O'Malley received me alone, her foster-sister not having altogether recovered from the fatigue of the preceding evening. There was a new hardness, even a harshness, both in the face and voice of Grace.

At first, however, she was in no mood for recounting her experiences, and could do nothing but lament the fact that Sabina Lynch had managed to get away when the gate was forced. Indeed, her escape appeared entirely to overshadow in her mind her own escape and that of Eva.

"Had it not been for her plottings and schemings," said she, "I should have brought the Governor round to my will. I had several interviews with Sir Nicholas, and at the beginning he was inclined to grant my suit, but soon I felt I was being thwarted by one more subtle than Sir Nicholas. How that woman hates me! I did not suspect her at once, for I had given her no cause of offence."

"Did you find out," asked I, "why she hates you?"

"'Tis from jealousy," said she. "Sabina Lynch would be Queen of Connaught, but she thinks that

as long as I am free and powerful I am her rival."

"Is there no other reason?" inquired I, remembering the words of Richard Burke. "Is there not between you two a cause more personal?"

"There may be," she replied thoughtfully; "for clever as she is, she was not sufficiently so to conceal from me her predilection for the MacWilliam. But what is that to me? Richard Burke is nothing to me."

"You may be much to him, however," I answered, whereat she grew more thoughtful still. Being a woman, I said to myself, she could hardly have failed to read the signs of his regard for her. Then I told her of the midnight visit he had paid me, saying nothing, nevertheless, of what Richard Burke had confided to me in regard to his love for herself.

"He is a friend," said she, after musing for awhile, "and I may have need of many such."

"Tell me what passed between you and Sir Nicholas."

She paced the floor of the poop-cabin with quick, uneven steps; then she stopped and spoke.

"After our first meeting," said she, "he was much less open with me, asking me many questions, but giving no expression of his own views with respect to the ships. Two things, however, he impressed upon me. One was that he considered that I should make immediately a suitable marriage——"

"A suitable marriage!" I exclaimed.

"The other was that it was common report that my father had left great riches behind him, and that, as he had never paid any tribute to the Queen, I must now make good his deficiencies in that respect."

"Tribute," said I blankly.

"He proposed to marry me—for he declared I was in reality a ward of the Crown, and, therefore, at his disposal—to Sir Murrough O'Flaherty, a man old enough to be my father—and our enemy. I would have none of it. I fancy I have to thank Sabina Lynch for suggesting it to Sir Nicholas, and I replied to him, with indignation, that I was a free woman, and would give my hand where I pleased. It was then that I discovered that I was no longer at liberty, for it was told me that I must on no account leave the Lynches' house without the permission of the Governor, but that no harm would come to me if I consented to his terms. I spoke of the safe conduct which Sir Nicholas had given me, but that was of no avail; and 'reasons of State,' said he, overruled any safe conduct."

"This is how they keep faith!" I cried, bitterly.

"It was no time for railing," continued Grace O'Malley, "as I was in the Governor's hands, and could see no way of getting out of them. Therefore I made as though I were about to submit myself, and I desired to see the Governor again with respect to the tribute to be paid to the Queen. My request being granted, Sir Nicholas acquainted me with his determination, demanding a thousand cows and two

hundred mares, or their equivalent in gold and silver, by way of payment of the arrears, and two hundred cows each year for the future."

"To all of which you said No!" cried I.

"Nay, Ruari," replied she, "I had to match my wits against his power over me—was not I his prisoner?—and so I returned him no immediate answer, but, on the contrary, besought that I might have a week to deliberate in, bemoaning my hard fate, and protesting that I should never be able to comply with his demands, yet that I would do what was within my ability to compass."

"And then?" I said.

"He pondered long and deeply, hesitating and doubtful; so, knowing the covetous nature of the man," said she, "I took the cross I was wearing from my neck, and, giving it to him, begged that he would grant me the delay I sought."

"Your jewelled cross?" I said.

"My case was an evil one," replied she, "and I did it not without pain, for the cross had been my mother's, and was, besides, of great value."

"He consented?"

"He became very gracious because of the bribe," replied she, "and then asked me to be present at the revel. 'Why,' said he, 'should you not take part in it, if you would care so to do?' As I was resolved to humour him, I was complaisant, and replied that nothing would be more agreeable to me; but even as I uttered these words, some inkling of the plan for our deliverance which we

carried out was forming itself in my mind. My woman afterwards managed to leave the Lynches' unobserved with the letter I wrote you, and gave it to the captain of the Scottish ship we passed on our way to Galway. My only fear was that he might inform the Governor, and so our plans would have been frustrated; but he has proved himself a true man, and one who may be trusted."

"There is no confidence to be put in Sir Nicholas," said I.

"The man is hard, stark, relentless," said she, hotly, "but he shall find I am as hard, stark, and relentless as he is himself. Vengeance—vengeance, and that speedy, will I take!"

Never had I seen Grace O'Malley so carried away by passion as now. Her eyes were blazing fires; the line made by her lips was like the edge of a sword, so clear and sharp it was; the cheeks lost their colour and roundness, and, as she restlessly moved about, her black hair flew round her head like a coronal of quivering water-snakes.

"Vengeance—vengeance!" she cried.

Her vehemence bore me along as upon a fast-flowing tide.

"Vengeance—vengeance!" I shouted, so that my voice rang out far beyond the galley.

"It is in our own hands," she said, more composedly. "The wine fleet from Spain is expected in Galway to-day or to-morrow—at any moment we may see their sails on the southern edge of the sea. Then, then," cried she furiously, her anger

rising again like the sudden, fierce blast of the tempest, "shall I teach Galway and Sir Nicholas to fear and dread my name."

The wine fleet! This was a quarry, indeed!

For each year at this season there set out from Cadiz for Limerick and Galway a goodly fleet of galleons, each of which carried a burden more to be desired than a king's ransom. These ships were laden with many barrels of the wines both of France and Spain, with rolls of silks, with bales of fine leather, with suits of raiment and shirts of mail, and blades of Toledo, and with other articles of price, the products of Europe, and, even, to some extent, of the mysterious Orient, where Turk and infidel held their sway. These were exchanged against the fish—for which our island was famous—the hides, salt, meat, wheat, and barley of the country.

Grace O'Malley's vengeance on Galway was to attack, capture, or destroy that portion of the wine fleet, as it was commonly spoken of, the destination of which was that town. The boldness and daring of the project took my breath away; but I could conceive of nothing that was so likely to cause consternation and terror as its successful issue to the great merchants of the city, and to mortify and enrage the Governor.

It was a great enterprise—this attack—and one which, if the event went against us, would probably be the end of us all. But there was one thing that gave us an advantage, which, skilfully used,

could not fail to be of such importance as to be almost in itself decisive. This was that the wine fleet had arrived safely at Galway year after year, without falling in with any danger other than that which came from the ordinary risks of the sea. Hence the immunity they had so long enjoyed would breed in them a feeling of complete security, and dispose them to be careless of precautions.

Still I was staggered; and what was passing through my mind being seen in my face, Grace O'Malley inquired, a trifle disdainfully:

"Think ye, Ruari, the venture too much for me?"—and the accent fell on the last word of the sentence. "I tell you, Nay!"

"Nothing—nothing," exclaimed I, wildly, "is too high for you! As for me, it is yours to command—mine to obey."

Then we took counsel together, first having summoned Tibbot the Pilot, and the other chiefs and officers who were in the galleys. When Grace O'Malley had made her purpose known there was at first the silence of stupefaction, then there followed the rapid, incoherent, impulsive exclamations of fierce and savage glee.

While we were occupied in this manner, a fishing smack had come into the bay, and on it were the pipers Phelim and Cormac and some others of our men, whom we had been forced to leave behind, but who had made their way out of Galway, being secretly helped therein by the fisher-folk who dwelt in a village by themselves without

the gates. These brought word that the city was in a state of great alarm, and that the Governor had declared that he would not rest until he had sent out an expedition to raze Grace O'Malley's castles to the ground, to destroy her galleys, and to blot out her name from Ireland.

Nothing had been needed to add to our determination, but, if need there had been, here it was. We were now all proclaimed rebels and traitors, so that we could look for nothing but torture and death at the hands of the English. A price would soon be placed upon our heads, and whoever wrought us a mischief or an injury of any kind would be considered as doing the Queen a service.

Such was our situation. To most of our people the Queen of England was no more than an empty name, and even to those of us who appreciated the might and resources of that princess, it appeared better that we should be aware of who were our foes and who were our friends, and if her representative, Sir Nicholas Malby, were our open enemy, as we were now well assured he was, we knew with whom our quarrel lay, and what we might expect from him.

When all was said, the Governor had no overwhelming force at his disposal, and he was without ships, so that we felt no whit downcast with our lot; contrariwise, there was such gladness amongst us at the promise of the fighting with which our circumstances were pregnant that the hearts of any who doubted were uplifted and made firm and steadfast.

As we were discussing our affairs Eva O'Malley entered the cabin. As our eyes met she smiled upon me, and held out her hand in greeting.

"'Twas well done," said she, referring to our escape from Galway, her thoughts still dwelling on the adventures of the past night. But when she heard of what we had been speaking, and of the proposed attack on the wine fleet, her sweet face became pale and troubled.

"Darkness and blood," said she, turning to me. "Oh! Ruari, the words of the Wise Man are to be fulfilled."

"What must be, must be," said I, "and there is none can gainsay that."

She shook her head.

"Eva," said Grace O'Malley, "the end is as it is appointed from the beginning." Then she began to reason gently with her foster-sister, and to show her that if the English found they had good reason to fear her they would gladly consent before long to make peace, and to concede what she had asked of Sir Nicholas.

But it was easy to see that my dear was sad and heavy of heart. Grace, ever most tender to her, put her arms about her, and made her sit beside her on a couch, and said many loving words, so that Eva was comforted, albeit some of her brightness vanished from that day, never to return. Although she had already shown how brave she was, and was to exhibit a courage far greater than my own or that of any man I ever

knew—her courage being that born of the spirit and ours but of the body—she sure was never made for that hard life of ours.

Gentle and sweet was she, yet the strain of the O'Malley blood ran in her veins, and made itself felt whenever the trials of her strength came.

Leaving the two ladies together, each went to his place in the ships. Some of my men, who had been ashore, now returned and informed me that they had learned that it was the annual custom to light a great fire on the headland of Arran, on which stand the ruins of the ancient castle called Dun Aengus, as soon as the vessels of the wine fleet hove into sight.

The smoke of this fire, if it were day, or the flame of it, if it were night, was a signal to the merchants of Galway, who, as soon as they saw it, made preparations for the reception of the ships—this being the chief event each year in the life of the town. To the end that the office of this beacon should be better fulfilled, they had placed a small body of soldiers and others in huts that stood between the crumbling walls of the old fort.

I debated with myself whether it would not be more prudent to have the lighting or the not lighting of the fire in my own power, but, being in no little doubt, put the matter off until later in the day. By the middle of the afternoon, however, there were abundant evidences that the weather, which had for days past been fine, was about to change; and as the sun fell, dark clouds were

gathering sullenly in the sky, the wind from the south-west was blowing stormily across the island—though our galleys felt it not at all, being under the lee of the land—and already we could hear the thunder of the waves as they rushed upon the further coast. And all the night through a tempest of terrible violence raged.

When the morning came, the fury of the gale rather increased than diminished, and so that day and the next, when the winds and waves began to subside, we remained at anchor in our harbour, safe from the storm. On the night of the third day the wind died down to a breeze, and the moon struggled fitfully through the scud and drift of the clouds.

Uncertain as to how the storm might shift, the galleys had been kept ready to put out from the shore at any moment, and therefore it fell out that nothing had been done by us with regard to the Galway men at Dun Aengus. In the middle watch, it being very dark save when the moon shone out, to be hidden again as fast as it appeared, we saw a bright tongue of flame shoot up, flashing and shining brightly against the blackness of the sky. Quickly raising our anchors, we made off past the island of Inishmaan, and on by Inisheer until we ran close in by the point of Trawkeera.

I wondered how it was that on such a night the watchman at Dun Aengus had made out the coming of the fleet, but discovered as we went upon our course, that another beacon had been

lit far down the southern coast, and as soon as they had seen it they had set a torch to their own. Thus were we also apprised of the coming of the wine fleet, and that by the hands of the people of Galway themselves, as it were. As the day began to dawn, greyly and drearily, a large, unwieldy Spanish galleon entered the South Sound, about half a league outside of Trawkeera. Not more than half her sails were set, and she rolled heavily from side to side in the swell left by the storm. A few sleepy sailors stood in the waist of the ship, and no armed watch was to be seen.

It had been arranged between Grace O'Malley and myself that I was to attack the first vessel that came in sight, and in the still, spectral light, we stole silently out from the shadow of Inisheer, the one great mainsail of *The Cross of Blood* being set, and the oars shipped until the word was given.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAPTURE OF THE *CAPITANA*.

As we crept on towards the unsuspecting merchant ship, I noticed that she presented a battered appearance, as if she had felt the full fury of the storm which we had ridden out so safely, and that she had not come out of it without much damage.

The foremast had been broken off, and now a great spar lashed to the stump had taken its place. About the middle of the vessel the bulwark showed a breach some five feet in length, and a piece of rough sailcloth had been fastened carelessly over it, so that the ragged edges of the broken wood were plainly seen jutting out from under it.

Doubtless the sailors were worn out with the stress of the working of their ship through the tempest, and this also accounted for the slackness of the watch and the ghostly quietness on board.

Otherwise, she was a splendid ship, the like of which was seen at no other time in these seas, save only when the wine fleet came each year to Galway. She was built with high castles both at the stern and at the bows; and she was, perhaps, of two hundred tons' burthen, according to the measure of the English.

Her name, cut out of solid wood and painted a

deep blue, was the *Capitana*. She flew the flag of Philip of Spain, and along with it at the stern were to be seen the ensigns of some gentlemen adventurers, who were in her, and who probably commanded her fighting men, or who had accompanied the expedition merely for the sake of seeing another part of the world.

For the galleon's defence against the rovers of the sea, who were to be found in great numbers off the French and English coasts, she showed her teeth in the guise of the black muzzles of twelve cannon, all formidable ordnance, and, armed with this equipment, as compared with that of *The Cross of Blood*, looked as if she might devour us at her leisure and with the utmost ease.

But it was not my purpose that these guns should ever be pointed at us, and so high were they out of the water—far above us, in fact—that there was no such terrible danger to be apprehended on this score. Besides, we were now too near her, and she was, in any case, unprepared.

When we had approached within four hundred yards of the *Capitana*, I gave orders that the sail of *The Cross of Blood* should be lowered to the deck quickly, and yet as quietly as might be, and that the rowers should get them to their oars, and speed us with all their might towards the Spanish ship.

So well was this effected that we were but, as it seemed, a stone's throw from her, and the beak of the galley, as she rose to the swell, pointed straight for the breach made by the storm in the waist of the

galleon, when the watch on board of her had their suspicions all too tardily aroused. If they had heard the noise made by the running of the tackle when the sail was got down, they had not grasped its meaning; but they could hardly fail to guess readily enough what our appearance indicated as we dashed towards them, our deck showing an array of arquebusiers and spearmen, standing to their weapons.

The men of the *Capitana* began to rush to and fro, and suddenly the clear notes of a trumpet blared forth from her poop—the all-too-late summons to arms. Her helmsmen, now alert to the danger which menaced them, endeavoured to swing her round on her heel into the wind, so as to keep us off.

We had stopped rowing, and our men were resting with their hands on the heads and handles of their oars, waiting for the order to ship them, when, as the Spaniard went about, her side caught the oars on the right side of the galley, and I heard the sharp cracking and splintering of the wood of which they were made as they were broken in pieces, and the piercing cries, most lamentable to the ear, of the rowers as they were knocked from their benches and jammed together, a huddled, mangled mass of shrieking and cursing, of wounded and dying men.

Amid the din and outcry which attended this disaster to us, there arose the voice of Calvagh O'Halloran, the master of the rowers, encouraging, directing, and calming the others. What had befallen us was a serious matter, as it deprived us of

any hope of getting away from the *Capitana* if our attack should prove unsuccessful.

I ran along the deck, telling our people to be of good heart, as all would yet be well; and, as nothing so inspired them as the war-cry of their tribe and the lust of fighting, I shouted loud and clear—

“O’Malley! O’Malley! O’Malley!”

The swinging of the Spaniard fended the galley off from her, so that there was a clear space for the breadth of a couple of oars, or a little more. As Calvagh got the rowers at work again, and *The Cross of Blood* went forward, the sides of the two ships grated together with a shock. They ground apart once again, and the water swished and swirled between them, foaming white and flecked with red as the blood of the rowers who had been injured dripped from the galley.

“On board, on board!” I cried. “A ring of gold to him who first boards her!” and I threw my battle-axe among her sailors. “Follow that!” I said.

The Irish were howling about me like hungry wolves, and *The Cross of Blood* shivered and trembled like a living thing as the rowers, Calvagh at their head, rushed from the benches, eager to revenge themselves for the death of their comrades of the oar, yelling hoarsely—

“O’Malley! O’Malley! O’Malley!”—the words stinging the ear like blows.

Now the sides of the vessels strained and groaned as again they smote together. The grappling-irons were fastened as they touched each other, and,

regardless of the thrusts made at us, we together clambered up the *Capitana's* side, entering by the breach over which the sailcloth had been stretched, and were immediately engaged in a hot and bloody fight, the issue of which stood in no kind of doubt from its commencement, as we far outnumbered the sailors in this part of the Spaniard.

One burly fellow came at me with a pike, but so uncertainly that I caught it from him with my left hand, and ran him through with the sword in my right. He dropped without a sound at my feet.

But while this contest was going on, and we were sweeping all before us, we soon were made to feel that, while so far successful, we were yet in a position of the greatest peril; for we were now assailed by shots from arquebuses fired down upon us both from the castle at the bows and that at the poop as well, and the air hummed with the arrows of our foes.

As there was no cover or protection of any kind where we stood, divers of our men fell sorely wounded, and some were slain outright. What the event was to bring forth then seemed nothing but our destruction, for we were caught, as it were, in a trap, and that one of our own making.

The doors leading into the castles were both shut, and, I conjectured, barricaded by this time against us. However, to remain where we were was to be slaughtered like cattle, and the attempt had to be made to force these entrances. The principal array of the enemy was in the poop castle, and I instantly decided that it must be stormed,

else we should all perish miserably, and to break in the door was the readiest way.

Calling on the Irish to follow me, I strode across the slippery deck, a bullet narrowly missing me, to the arched doorway through which lay the way to the castle on the poop.

Whether it was that our assault had been so little looked for, or that what had already taken place had occupied so brief a breath, as one may say—for who can take count of time in the heat of battle?—I know not; but this entrance had not been strongly secured, for hurling myself impetuously with all my force against the barrier I burst the door open, and that so violently and quickly that I had much ado to keep myself from stumbling, and so being trampled upon and killed by my own men. Recovering myself with an effort, I found myself in a wide chamber, in which there were tables and chests and other furniture, but not a single soul was to be seen.

At one end of it was a flight of steps leading up to the deck of the castle. Stopping my men, I bade them wait in this sheltered room while I ascended the steps, and reached another large cabin, also deserted as far as I could see, while above me I heard the trampling of many feet. Summoning my followers, I dashed up a second flight of steps, the Irish, who gave tongue like bloodhounds tracking deer, pushing in and swarming up behind me.

I was like enough to have paid for my rashness.

with my life, for as I emerged upon the deck of the poop, the point of a sword flashed off my body-armour, and I received so shrewd a buffet upon my shoulder from a mace or battle-axe of some kind, that I nearly lost my footing, and, as it was, would have done so but for the press of men behind me.

As I appeared a crowd of Spaniards rushed upon me from all sides, praying to Our Lady and all the saints for their aid, and above all naming "Santiago."

Now sweeping my sword in a great shining circle round my head, now stabbing and hacking and cleaving, while my strength seemed to grow with my necessity, I held them at bay, albeit in what way I escaped the deadly thrusts of spears and pikes, and the bullets aimed at me at such close quarters, I cannot tell.

Two or three slight wounds did I receive, and the sight of my own blood drove me into a perfect fury of killing, and rendered me regardless of myself; but as for the wounds themselves I heeded them not, and indeed in the fiery heat of that encounter scarce felt them at all. Soon, however, would I have been overborne and destroyed, if I had not been joined by Calvagh and the others, who charged upon the enemy with inconceivable fury.

Nothing could have stood before the tremendous outpouring of such incredible rage.

The gallant men of Spain fought on, and met

us bravely, brave with something more than the courage which is born of dark despair. For, to say the truth, never yet saw I any of that nation—even of its commonalty—that might be called a coward.

It is my belief, and good reason have I for it, that no more doughty men ever wielded sword or pike than those of Spain, nor were there any better sailors in those days in all the world. There be many, who, having regard to what she was—this great power of Spain—and considering what has happened to her, and how she is now shorn in no small degree of her glory, can account for it in no other way than by saying that she lieth under the Wrath of God. Howbeit, this is too high a matter for me. Only know I full well that the crew of the *Capitana*, whether fighting men or sailors, made such a stern and grim battle against us that grey morning in the Bay of Galway, as the most valiant knights could not have bettered.

Near the centre of the poop there rose up a mast, and around this our enemies gathered in a cluster, among them being some half-armed men whom I took to be the adventurers whose ensigns floated beside the standard of the galleon, and who carried themselves with an air.

They had had no time to have their armour put upon them and fastened with proper care, but as they proved themselves to be accomplished swordsmen they made a determined resistance to us. If they had come at me when I appeared at the top

of the steps, I should never have reached the deck of the poop alive; they had, however, tarried too long in the attempt to be clothed with their harness.

They were surrounded, and, though I offered them their lives, declaring that they would be held for ransom and would be well treated by Grace O'Malley, they would not listen to me, preferring rather to die, fighting, so long as the breath was in them, like the valiant men of Spain they were.

One only, who appeared to be the captain of the ship, I commanded to be taken alive—a business which was done with difficulty, so madly did he struggle, notwithstanding that the blood flowed in streams from several of his wounds.

“Yield yourself,” said I, “Señor Captain, for the ship is ours, and further fighting is useless. Give me your parole.”

But he refused, snarling and showing his teeth like a mad dog. Then I ordered him to be bound, and laid on the deck for the present.

The greater part of the galleon was now in our hands, but there still remained a band of Spaniards in the forecastle, who galled us with the fire from their pieces and the arrows of their bows. When they saw how their comrades had been overcome on the poop castle, they cut down the spar which had been lashed to the broken foremast, and using it and the sailcloth about it as a kind of barricade went on firing at us from behind this shelter.

Telling Calvagh, who had come out of the fight without a scratch, to take what men he thought

needful, I directed him to attack the forecastle, and at the same time protected his assault of it by a discharge from the poop of a small cannon I found there loaded. This position of the Spaniards, however, was one of such strength that they inflicted heavy loss upon us before they were all put to the sword.

We were now masters of the entire vessel, but its capture had cost us dear. Fifteen of the Irish were killed, and as many more wounded, several of them seriously; and when the sun rose across the dim outline of the hills away beyond Galway its rays fell upon decks that ran dark with blood, and upon a wearied band of men, whose gasping breath came and went in sobs of pain, now that the excitement was past, and who threw themselves down in sheer exhaustion. I myself was sore spent, but the day was only begun, and the rest of the wine fleet might come into view at any moment. Therefore I bade my men rise up as soon as they had rested somewhat, and then endeavoured to put the *Capitana* into sailing trim.

While this was being done I shaped our course for Inisheer, remaining on the *Capitana* myself with some of my crew, and sending Calvagh to take charge of *The Cross of Blood*. I also had the captain of the galleon brought before me, to see if I could get any information from him about the other ships of the fleet.

“Señor Captain,” said I, “the chance of war has delivered you and your ship to me. Ye fought well,

and I am grieved that so many valiant souls no longer see the light; yet would I have spared them, as many as I could, but they would not. You are in no danger of your life, if you will but answer the questions I ask of you."

I spoke in English, my knowledge of Spanish being slight, but I judged that the captain of a ship trading to Ireland, and particularly to the English city of Galway, would be certain to understand the English tongue. At first it appeared, however, as if he did not comprehend my words.

"Kill me, kill me!" he exclaimed in Spanish, while his face was distorted with impotent rage.

Replying to him mildly that I had no intention of putting him to death, I informed him that I had no sufficient acquaintance with his own language, and therefore I was unable to converse with him in it.

"You surely understand English," said I.

One of the Irish who was on guard over him thrust a dagger into him for an inch or more before I knew what he would be about, whereupon the Spaniard cursed him and us and himself and his ship and the day he was born in as good English as ever I heard.

"I shall tell you nothing," said he. "No, by St. Jago, nothing, nothing, nothing!"

I felt a pity for the man, and told one of those standing near me to fetch him some wine, and that as speedily as might be, and again asked him if he were resolved to die; but he merely

glared at me like a wild animal, and I left him alone, reserving him to be questioned by Grace O'Malley.

When the wine was brought he drank it thirstily, saying, "If it is poisoned, so much the better."

And now we drew near again to Inisheer. Rounding the Point of Trawkeera, we dropped anchor beside the two other galleys, and my mistress came on board of our prize. When I told her of the great fight the Spaniards had made, and what it had cost us to take the ship, she sighed and became pensive.

"We can ill afford so many men," she said, "but the other ships of the wine fleet may be captured or destroyed more easily. Bring the captain of the galleon to me, and let me see if I can learn anything from him of his companions."

"He will say nothing," I exclaimed.

Grace O'Malley's face grew dark, but she merely repeated her command. When the Spanish captain was fetched in, he was struck with amazement when he beheld a woman, young, handsome, and, as some thought, beautiful, who appeared to be the chief and leader of us all. At first he gazed at her as one who sees an apparition or a phantom.

"Madre de Dios! Madre de Dios!" he said aloud in his astonishment, and for some time acted as one might who suspected that his sense of sight was playing him a trick. He was faint and pale from loss of blood, and presented a piteous appearance.

"Free him from his bonds," said Grace O'Malley, and I cut away the thongs that held him.

"Señor Captain," continued she when this had been done, "I have a quarrel with the Governor of Connaught and the people of Galway, who have treated me despitefully,—therefore has your galleon been taken."

"You, Señorita!" he said.

"I was beguiled with fair words and promises," said she, "and then they made me a prisoner, but I escaped from them. War have I declared against them, and a great revenge shall I take. You, I hear, are a brave man, and I have need of such in this contest with the English. Will you join me?"

"That will I not," said he; and I heard him muttering to himself, "She is a devil."

"Better consider before you speak," said I, seizing his arm roughly.

"Let me be, let me be," said he, "for I am a dying man!" And he swooned upon the deck. Reviving in a few minutes, he staggered to his feet, whereupon I put my arm round him for his support.

"Where are the other ships of the fleet, tell me," said Grace O'Malley, "and how many are there?"

"You can kill me," said he, "and I shall thank you for it, but that which I know I shall never tell you."

And again I heard him muttering, "Devil, devil!" and calling upon "Santiago" to protect him from her spells.

Grace O'Malley gazed at him, and of a sudden

there was in her eyes—what I never looked to see in them on such an occasion—a dew of tears springing from an unsuspected fount of pity. After all, she was a woman, as I have said.

“You are a brave man and a true,” said she, “and I will not plague you more. Let him die in peace,” cried she to me, “if die he must.”

As I was about to place him with his back against a mast so as to ease him, he made a snatch at the dagger which was in my belt; his fingers closed over it, but even as he grasped it his lips parted and his spirit fled.

“God rest thee, thou gallant mariner of Spain!” said Grace O’Malley, when she saw that the captain of the galleon was dead.

“Amen,” cried I, for the firmness of the man had seemed to me a very noble thing.

CHAPTER IX.

A CHEST OF GOLD.

THE day had worn on to noon but without its brightness, for the sky had again become full of heavy clouds driven up from the west; the wind moaned and raved over land and sea, and the waves beat drearily upon the shore. The thunder rolled and the lightning flashed, while the pelting rain came down in huge drops that sounded on our decks like hail or the cracking of whips.

The ensanguined waters flowed in floods from the planking and the sides of the captured galleon, which lay like some great wounded monster of the deep, sweating blood. Closer into the land we steered, and so saved ourselves from the worst of the gale.

For the present all thoughts of searching for the other vessels of the fleet had to be given up, and fain was I to rest, for my wounds, though slight, were sore, and the dull aching of my shoulder was hard to bear. Seeing my state, Grace O'Malley bade me go to her own galley, where Eva would attend to my wounds with her gentle fingers, and then, perhaps, sing me to sleep with one of the songs of her people.

This command went so well with every beating

of my heart that my pains were all but forgotten, and when I reached *The Grey Wolf*, Eva met me, and waited upon me, and made so much of the "Mountain of a Man," as she often called me, that the only pangs I felt were those caused by my love for her—so much so that the tale of it was trembling on my lips, though I could not for the life of me put it into words, but dumbly looked, and longing—looked again and again at her.

Fool that I was, dolt that I was, not to have spoken then! But my tongue was tied, as with a ribbon of steel, and if one were to ask me why this was, I could not tell, nor can I now, looking back across the blunt edge of years. Yet here was such an opportunity, if I could have grasped it, but it passed.

Eva sang softly to me as I lay with my harness off on a couch, until I fell a-sleeping and a-dreaming, and all through the sleeping and the dreaming did I hear the sound of her singing, far off, indistinctly, and murmurous, like that of the brooks among the silent hills.

When I awoke, it was evening, and both she and Grace O'Malley were seated by my side. The storm had abated, and already a weak, watery moon was riding in the heavens, and, as I opened my eyes, its faint beams fell whitely upon the faces of my mistresses, so that to me, being still only half awake, they looked like spirits. I rose to a sitting posture, and felt that my strength had come back to me.

"Has your weariness left you?" asked Grace O'Malley, smiling kindly at me.

For answer I stretched my limbs and my body, and smiled at her without speaking, though the pain in my shoulder still troubled me, and I could not move without feeling it.

"While you have slept, Ruari," she went on, "I have gone over as much of the galleon as might be in the hours of daylight at my disposal, and the riches in her are truly wonderful. Never saw I so great a store of all manner of things of value in a ship before. 'Tis a splendid spoil, and the merchants of Galway will have good cause to remember me, and Sir Nicholas will be beside himself with rage."

"We have not yet finished with them or with Sir Nicholas," said I. "The *Capitana* is not the only ship of the wine fleet."

"Neither has Sir Nicholas done with us, I fear," said Eva, sadly, "nor the people of Galway."

"Sometimes it seems to me, Eva," said Grace to her foster-sister, "as if you were only half an O'Malley." Then she turned to me again. "Ruari, I have more to tell about the galleon. On board of her there is a chest of gold—all money of Spain, coined pieces, bearing the effigy of the late Emperor, Charles. Now, hearken! A strange, wild story goes with this chest of gold, and there is that in it which may concern us very closely."

"Yes," I said, my interest being keenly stirred as I guessed from the slow and almost solemn way in which she addressed me, that she had stumbled

probably on some mystery of the sea—something, at any rate, unexpected and out of the way, and yet something that might touch us nearly. “Yes,” I said, watching her intently, “it is naught of evil import for us, surely?”

“That I know not as yet,” she replied. “Rather does it portend a benefit; time alone can tell. This is how we came to find the gold, and we might never have gotten it of ourselves—we were told of it.”

“How was that?”

“While our search through the galleon was being made, two men, bound in fetters and chained together, were discovered in a small, dark den, low down in the ship; a hole, indeed, so cunningly concealed from observation that even the very sailors on board the *Capitana* might not have known of its existence, if its being hidden from them were deemed necessary or expedient. The men were half-starved, and so utterly wretched that when they were brought into the light they were as the blind, and gibbered like idiots. What they say, now that they have come to themselves, is pitiful enough, and I believe they are telling the truth.”

“Who are they?” asked I, as she meditated on their story. “What account do they give of themselves? You have said nothing about the chest of gold.”

“One of them,” said she “tells me that he is a Geraldine, a near relative of Garrett, Earl of Desmond.”

“An Irishman!” I broke in.

"Yes, so he says, and I doubt it not," said she. "The other is a Spaniard, Don Francisco de Vilela by name, a man of rank, if one may judge of him from his speech and carriage. But you will see them yourself shortly."

"What is their explanation of their being prisoners on board of the galleon? Is it concerned with the chest of gold?"

"Yes, so they say," she replied; "and they relate that before the *Capitana* left Spain they made a bargain with its captain to convey them to Ireland for a certain sum of money, which they paid over to him before he put out from port. Their compact with him was that they were to be landed at some lonely point or secluded place on our western coasts, and not at any town, such as Limerick or Galway."

"Why was that?" I asked. "Doubtless the captain of the galleon made a similar inquiry of them."

"They say he asked them no questions whatever," replied she; "but he must have understood that they had some business of a very private nature, probably concerned with State affairs. Evidently that business lay with the native Irish, and not with the English, from whom they wished their movements to be kept secret, else would there have been no need to have avoided any of the English towns in Ireland."

"It may be," said I, for I could not help seeing the drift of her words, "that they are the bearers of some message from the King of Spain to the Earl of Desmond, or some other chief of the Irish."

"You do not fall very short of the mark," said she.

"But," asked I, "how came it about, or what happened to cause them to be thrust into chains, and that on board a Spanish ship? Those who brought a message from the Spanish King would surely have been well-treated, and even honoured, by the captain of a ship coming out of Spain. Plainly, there is something here which fits not in with their narration."

"They say that it was because of the chest of gold," she replied. "The captain is dead, so that we shall never hear his version of the affair, but they affirm he could not withstand the temptation of the gold. Brave, as we know he was, and an excellent sailor, as they say he was reputed to be, yet would he have sold his very soul for gold."

"How did he know of it?"

"So heavy a chest could hardly have been brought on board without his knowledge, and to conjecture what it contained was no such difficult matter. They did not conceal from him their anxiety for its safe-keeping, and one or other of them was always on guard over it. Anyone would have known, therefore, that it held a treasure of some kind. All went well until they reached the coast of Kerry, when, reminding the captain of their agreement with him, they requested him to send them, the chest, and the rest of their belongings ashore in a boat. The sea was very rough, however, and he assured them the thing was impossible.

"That might well have been the case," said I.

"They therefore confided to him—what he most likely knew already—that they had come over on a secret embassy from the King of Spain, and besought him, by his fidelity to his King, to put them ashore. He protested that their landing at the time would be attended with difficulty, and even danger, and again refused their request.

"They expostulated with him, but in vain; he was not to be moved, having already, they say, determined that they should never deliver their message. Next they offered him a large sum of money, and, when he asked where they were to get it from, told him of the gold, but without informing him of the amount they had in the chest. Still, he would not give way, and, at length, on their continuing to urge him, he became sullen, angry and abusive, hurling many hurtful words at them in his wrath. His real reason, they began to fear, was not the roughness of the sea, for some sheltered bay or inlet with calm water might have easily been reached, had he so desired, but that he had resolved to possess himself of their treasure."

"They had played into his hands by speaking of the contents of the chest," I said.

"That was their mistake, and they have had to repent themselves of it. That same night, while they slept, they were seized, put into manacles, and thrown into the close and filthy den in which they were discovered by us.

"They saw the captain but once after their

imprisonment, and he had told them—for their comfort—that it had been his original intention to fling them overboard, but that he had changed his mind, and would deliver them up, instead, to the English Governor of Connaught, when the ship arrived at Galway, as plotters against the peace of Ireland. Then they never would be heard of again, for all men knew of what sort of stuff Sir Nicholas Malby was made, and how short and sharp were his dealings with those who conspired against the Queen, once they were in his power.”

This was an evil hearing in regard to one who in his dying had shown a not unmanly kind of virtue; but who is there that does not know that gold is for most men the god of the whole earth? The story of the two struck me as being true, as it was stamped through and through with a sort of human naturalness. And I said as much.

“When the captain told them,” continued Grace O’Malley, “of the fate in store for them, they offered him all the gold they had in the chest if only he would let them go. But he answered them that it was his already, and that he had no intention of parting with it. If they lived, he would never feel safe—and the dead had no tongue. Hearing this, they gave up all hope, and abandoned themselves to the gloom of despair, cursing the captain for his perfidy.

“Then the storm came on, and the galleon drove hither and thither with the tempest. Their wretchedness increased, until they reflected that it would be

better to perish by drowning than to live to undergo the torture and miserable death which Sir Nicholas would be certain to inflict upon them."

"The tale," I said, when I had pondered it for a few minutes, "does not sound to me as if it were false."

"It was so far confirmed," said Grace O'Malley, "inasmuch as the chest of gold, the possession of which worked their undoing, lay concealed in the cabin which the captain had occupied. For safe-keeping I had it removed to this galley."

"Did they tell you," said I, my thoughts reverting to what, after all, was the most important part of their statements, "what was the burden of their message from the King of Spain?"

"Not fully," she replied, "and I forebore from questioning them more narrowly until they had recovered. They did say that Philip wishes well to Ireland, or rather, he loves not the English, who condemn him to his face, and singe his very beard. They hinted that the King had sent Don Francisco to spy out the land, and to become acquainted with the wishes of the princes and chiefs of the island."

"For what purpose? To what end?"

"To encourage them to rebel against the Queen, by giving them such help as is within his power. At the same time, he does not wish to appear to be concerned in the affairs of Ireland at all."

I had heard of Philip before as a man who was uncertain of purpose and infirm of will, timid when he should have been bold, and bold when

he should have been timid; one who covered himself and his designs with a cloak of clumsy cunning which it required no skill to see through, and of deceit which deceived none of the least discerning of his enemies. Therefore said I not a word, but contented myself to wait for what my mistress might say further on the matter.

She was silent, however, and I could see from her rapt, indrawn look, that her thoughts had wandered far away from us and the galleys and the wine fleet—perhaps to Spain and its shiftY King. I, too, was busy thinking, and, as I conceived that we had affairs immediately before us of more importance than even Philip of Spain, I made bold to interrupt her reveries.

“We can at least gather from the two men,” said I, “how many ships were in the wine fleet. The rest of them cannot now be far off from us.”

“Yes,” said she, rousing herself from her musings like one from slumber, “they informed me that there were nine galleons in the fleet when they left Cadiz, four of them were bound for Limerick and five for Galway.”

“Then there are still four ships for us to fight,” I exclaimed. “Let the chest of gold and the King of Spain wait, say I. Would it not be well, now that the wind has fallen, to send one of the galleys to keep a look-out?”

“Tibbot the Pilot,” she replied, “already watches the Sound in *The Winged Horse*. The galleons will most likely have been separated from each

other by the recent storms, but if any one of them comes into sight we will quickly be apprised of it."

"Have you not had enough of fighting for one day?" asked Eva.

"We have vowed vengeance on Galway," I said, and Eva said no more, but sighed deeply.

There was a knocking at the door of the cabin, and a servant entered with the message that Don Francisco de Vilela and Dermot Fitzgerald desired speech of Grace O'Malley, to thank her for her kindness to them. Permission being granted, the two men soon made their appearance. They had eaten, had washed themselves, and were attired in fresh clothes taken from the supplies on board the galleon, and looked very different, I imagine, from what they had done when they had emerged from the hole in the *Capitana*, where they had been imprisoned.

Both of them bowed with a profound reverence to my mistresses, and I took note, even in the half-light, of the contrast they made as they stood together. The Irishman was fair and ruddy, the Spaniard dark and swarthy as most Spaniards are. Fitzgerald was tall—nearly as tall as myself—Don Francisco of the middle height, but having a very soldierly bearing and an air of resolution which his comrade lacked. Thus much I saw at a glance.

De Vilela was the first to speak, and his accent had all the smooth deference of the court rather than the rough sincerity of the camp.

“Señorita,” said he, “if you will suffer a poor gentleman of Spain to offer you his thanks——”

“Madame,” said the Irishman, interrupting him impulsively, “I never dreamt the day would come when I should be glad to be a prisoner——”

“Nay, nay!” quoth Grace O’Malley, “no more of that, I beg.”

The glance of the two men swept past her, de Vilela’s to fasten on Eva O’Malley, Fitzgerald’s on me, while my mistress made us known to each other. Then they entreated her to say what was her will in regard to them, and what ransom she demanded for their release. But she replied that she had not yet determined, and so put them off.

She conversed for some minutes with de Vilela, speaking to him of the West Indies, whither, it appeared, he had been in one of the very ships for which Tibbot the Pilot was watching—the *San Millan de Simancas*.

I now had had leisure to observe him more closely, and he gave me the impression of a man of high breeding. He discoursed with a tongue of winning sweetness, more like a woman’s than a man’s, and yet one had only to examine with a little carefulness the lines of his face to be convinced that these soft tones were like the fur over claws, and that there was nothing else of the feminine about him.

His companion, Fitzgerald, was of a very different type, although he, too, was of knightly birth—rash, unstable, easily swayed, but generous and warm of

heart, with quick, unstudied manners, and no capacity for much besides the wielding of his sword.

Ever as the Spaniard spoke his dark, eloquent eyes wandered from one to another of us, resting with an absorbed intensity longest on Eva—a thing in no wise to be wondered at, but which I did not care to see, although I had no right to be jealous.

And then there broke upon the hush of the night, now grown still and calm, the zip-zap-swish, zip-zap-swish of the oars of a galley, quickly driven by its rowers through the water; there was the low, clear call of Tibbot as *The Winged Horse* came up towards us, while at his word the oars hung motionless and glistening in the pale moonlight, and I went out to hear what tidings he brought.

He reported that the tops of the masts of two large ships were to be seen on the horizon, and that there might be more, as the light was but faint owing to the clouds that still passed over the sky. I hastened back to inform my mistress of Tibbot's news. The door of the cabin opened before I had reached it and Grace O'Malley appeared upon the scene, and as the door closed behind her I saw that Don Francisco was speaking earnestly to Eva, who, for her part, was listening to him with deep attention.

CHAPTER X.

A WOMAN'S WILE.

"WHAT news?" demanded Grace O'Malley.

Repeating Tibbot's words to her, I asked what her commands were.

"This afternoon while you slept, Ruari," she replied, "the idea of a certain artifice or stratagem came into my mind, and the darkness of the night is so much in favour of its successful issue that there is no reason why it should not be attempted. It was suggested to me as I went over the stores of the galleon by the quantities of all manner of garments on board of her——"

So had spoken very rapidly, being conscious that with the galleons not far away there was no time to spare.

"Enough, at present," she continued. "I will tell you more of it when I have made a disposition of our ships."

"The prisoners?" I questioned. "They can scarcely be expected to join us in an attack on Spanish ships—even although these ships are in reality more the property of the merchants of Galway than of any others."

"Transfer them," said she, "to *The Cross of Blood*, which I shall leave here under Calvagh's charge.

When you have seen them safely in his hands come to me—I shall be on the *Capitana*.”

“The *Capitana*!” I exclaimed, surprised.

“Yes,” said she. “In a little while you will see why I say the *Capitana*.”

I hurried off into the cabin, and telling Don Francisco and Fitzgerald that they were to be put for the night aboard of my galley, and having whispered to Eva that there was something in the wind, but that I knew not quite what it was, I conducted the two men to *The Cross of Blood*, and delivered them over to Calvagh, bidding him keep a close guard over them. Then I got into a boat, and in a trice was on the Spanish galleon's deck.

Just as I reached it the clouds drifted from off the face of the moon, and as I looked up around me I could scarcely believe my eyes at what I saw. Pausing not to think, I placed my hand upon my sword, and had pulled it half-way out of its sheath, when a voice which I recognised as Tibbot the Pilot's, sang out close to my ear, while there was a splutter of laughter in his throat, as he said—

“’Tis a wise man who sometimes doubts his seeing aright, Ruari Macdonald. Know you not your friends from your foes?”

Tibbot, I perceived, was not attired in the Irish fashion, but had discarded his saffron mantle and his long, wide-sleeved jacket, and had replaced them by a sober Spanish suit, under which, one might be sure, was a shirt of mail.

And now I noticed that the sailors who moved

about us, getting the galleon ready for sea, were no more our own wild kernes of Mayo, but all mariners of Spain!

"Tibbot," said I, "what is the meaning of this? Wherefore is this mummerly?"

"'Tis by our mistress's order," said he, "and 'tis herself will have good reason for it, I'm thinking." And his cheeks creased with laughter.

Grace O'Malley had said something of a stratagem, —was this it? One quicker of apprehension than myself would have seen what her intentions were, but I had to go and ask her for an explanation.

And, lo, on the poop deck, where a few hours before there had been so great a struggle, I found not my mistress, but a youthful, handsome, smiling, debonair knight of Spain, who yet had the eyes and the accents of our princess! By her side there stood the captain of the *Capitana*, risen from the dead—or such a passable imitation of him in face and figure as might well have deceived the living.

I stared stupidly at them both,—and then I understood. For the nonce, we were no longer O'Malleys or other free Irish rovers of the sea, but dons and señors—if you please,—soldiers and sailors under the flag of Spain; the *Capitana* for the time being had not been taken, but was still bound in all security for the port of Galway—only haply, that being stayed by storms, she had taken shelter behind the island of Arran, from which she would presently emerge to meet the other galleons as they came up.

And then—the thing was plain enough.

A woman's wit is a wonderful thing, and well is it for us men that the loves and the hates of women do dim the brightness of it, else would we be dazzled and blind and dumb all our days, and our strength be but a vain thing.

"What think you of my plot?" said the young gentleman adventurer, this Spanish knight, who was my mistress.

"You are a great magician, señor!" said I, taking her humour. "And what would you with this Ruari Macdonald—once the sworn servant of an Irish princess, known as Grace O'Malley?"

"By my faith," cried she, "I would not have him changed for all the world."

And the words were dear to me, so that my heart glowed within me—even as it does now at the memory of them.

Then she spoke to me with some fulness of the snare she was preparing for the two galleons, now beating up towards the Sound.

It was the case, no doubt, said she, that the five ships of the wine fleet had been scattered over the western seas by the storm, but those Tibbot had seen had managed to keep by each other or had come together again, and were travelling as slowly as possible, with a view to picking up their companion vessel, and, further, that their sailing powers would most probably have been reduced by the damage wrought upon them by the tempest.

Her purpose was to stand off and on in the Sound, manœuvring the *Capitana* in such a way as

to indicate that she had also suffered from the violence of the weather; to allow the ships to come up within near hail of her—which they would be certain to do, as they could have no suspicion of what had befallen the *Capitana*, especially as they would be able to see nothing strange in the appearance of the galleon or in the dress of those on board of her—and then to trust to the chances of the hour for the rest.

When I raised the objection that this plot of hers necessitated the absence of the galleys from the attack, she replied that no more than a bare guard had been left on board of them, and that she had as many as eighty men out of them, and had placed them on the *Capitana*, a number which she thought more than sufficient for the enterprise.

“If all goes well,” said she, “I will myself lead the assault on the first ship, and Tibbot on the other—if they have to be fought together at the same time; do you remain on the *Capitana*, for she must be seen to by one who is a seaman, and much may depend on the way in which she is managed. Besides, you must still be weary of the fight of a few hours ago. But circumstances will guide us.”

“Surely,” said I, “there is no need for you to expose yourself, and my fatigue is gone.”

“Nay, nay!” said she, “let the thing stand.”

The anchor was gotten up, and out beyond the point of Trawkeera went the ship, the moon now shining more clearly, and the stars showing here and there like diamonds through a scarf of clouds. And there, not more than a mile away, loomed

up the two galleons for which we were on the watch.

The wind was light, and the sails of the galleon, which was the nearer of the two to us, showed up in grey shadows against the velvety black of the sky. She was of the usual build of the merchant ship of Cadiz, with the same lumbering breadth, the same high castles at poop and bows, and the same rig in every respect as had that which we had captured, and was of much the same size. Some distance behind her was her companion, and the two vessels were so much alike that the second appeared to be the double of the first.

As soon as we were within view, a lantern was waved three times towards us from the bows of the leading ship—a signal to which we responded by also waving a lantern three times, surmising that some such answering sign would be expected back in return.

We waited with an anxious curiosity to see how this would be taken, and as we saw the dark figures of the watch hurrying, in evident alarm, to the bulwarks to gaze at us, and heard their voices raised in discussion coming faintly across the waters, we could not fail to understand that some other token had been looked for.

In their perplexity they knew not what to make of us, and we could see plainly enough that there was an argument going on among them in respect of us. As the distance between us slowly lessened, their uncertainty and indecision were increased when they

beheld, as we took excellent care they should, a few of the O'Malleys standing on the fore-deck of the *Capitana*. Even had it been as bright as day, they could not have imagined that they were other than Spanish sailors like themselves.

Our men had been ordered to remain quite still and silent, and under the moon, over which a web of cloud was being spun, they appeared like figures carved out of stone.

The watchman on the bows of the galleon hailed us, and though his voice sounded clearly to us, we pretended not to hear; he called again through the quiet of the night, and when we returned no answer we could see that he ran with a sort of terror of he knew not what from his place, and was lost in the darkness of the fore-castle.

In the meantime we had come close up to her, her sailors bending blanched, fear-stricken faces over her bulwarks upon us, and perhaps thinking that they saw before them the fabulous *Ship of Death*, upon which for ever sail the souls of those foully murdered on the sea, and which for the nonce had taken on the form of the *Capitana* to lure them to their doom, for never might human eyes behold that dreaded sight and live.

The two ships were now so near each other that it required but a touch of the helm and the quick ringing word of command from Grace O'Malley—the statues sprang to life, and a host of the O'Malleys jumped on board the galleon at different points.

It was all the work of a twinkling, so soon was the ship carried. The watch on deck were overpowered and made prisoners with scarcely a blow being struck. Tibbot crept through a window in the poop of the Spaniard, and, followed by a dozen of the Irish, had secured those who were asleep or half-awakened before they could make any resistance. In the fore-castle alone was there any struggle, for there a handful of men stood to their weapons, and, refusing quarter, fought on till everyone of them was slain.

I had watched with straining eyes through the gloom for the form of that young Spanish knight who was my mistress, and, not seeing it anywhere, was in sore dismay; not many minutes, however, went by—the action had moved with the speed with which things change in a dream—when she appeared on the poop, as I thought.

Nor was I mistaken, for she called to me to trim the *Capitana* and to wear down upon the other galleon, which had changed her course, and was striving to make off southwards for the open sea. Her watch had given the alarm, and we could see the dark bodies of her crew and of her fighting men making to their posts.

Sending back to me some of our Irish for the better working of the *Capitana*, she caused the newly-captured vessel to be released from the grapplings and fastenings, by which I had had her bound to us while the attack was going on, and we swung apart. Crowding on sail in hot haste, we put about,

and went in pursuit of the fleeing galleon, which not only had the start of us, but now also appeared to be a better sailer than either of us, as we did not gain on her, but, on the contrary, rather fell back.

It was apparent that she would escape us if we were to trust to our sailing powers alone. I had just determined to train one of the cannon on board the *Capitana* on to her, when a loud explosion shook the air.

Of what had occurred, then and afterwards on the *Santa Ana*, as the ship Grace O'Malley had just taken was named, I was not a witness, nor was Tibbot, who told me of it, either; but it is narrated here just as I heard it.

Seeing that there was a likelihood of the galleon, to which we were giving chase, showing us a clean pair of heels, she ordered Tibbot to the helm of the *Santa Ana*, and, telling him of what she intended, she herself went among the prisoners, who were lying bound in different parts of the ship.

Among them she found divers persons who understood the Irish tongue, and them, by both promises and threats, she compelled to bring before her the master of the ordnance and those who assisted him in loading and firing the cannon. Surrounding these men with her own, each of whom had sword, spear, or battle-axe ready in his hand, she marched them to the fore-castle and forced them, on pain of instant death, to serve the two great cannon which were in the bow-ports. The first discharge of these was the explosion I had heard.

The balls from these pieces were so ineffective, passing wide of the mark and splashing into the sea a considerable distance from the galleon, that her anger was kindled, and she warned the master of the ordnance that if he were not more successful on a second attempt she would not spare him, being assured that he was merely trifling with her.

Whether it was because of the terrifying effect of her words, or because he was determined to give the galleon every opportunity for getting away from us, and was reckless of what became of himself, the succeeding shots flew as wide as before. When Grace O'Malley perceived this she was transported with rage, and, crying that he had brought his fate upon his own head, ran him through with her sword.

Had she not quickly interfered, all his companions would have been instantly despatched by the Irish, who were eager to emulate the example she had set them.

Aghast at the death of the master of the ordnance, and suspecting that there was no hope of anything else for themselves, they cried out sharply, breathlessly, tremblingly, each protesting and vowing by all the saints that he would undertake to do whatever he was bid, if only his life were promised him.

Seeing from their look that they were likely to do as they said, but fearing lest they should be unstrung, being so wrought upon by their terror, she agreed that they should not be slain, but commanded

them to chose from out of their number him who was the most skilful cannoneer, so that there should be no mistake in regard to the fit service of the ordnance. At the same time she told them that all their lives depended on him, for if he failed at the next discharge to damage the galleon, not only would he be immediately killed, but that all of them would likewise suffer instant death.

They chattered for a second together, and then one of them, perhaps bolder or more desperate than the rest, stepped forward, and accepted her offer.

Having warned him again, Grace O'Malley had the guns loaded once more, and stood over the man with drawn sword as he applied the burning match to the touch-hole of first one cannon and then of the other. When the smoke had cleared away, it was seen that the mainmast of the galleon had been shot through and had fallen over, so that it lay partly across her waist and partly was in the water.

Thus impeded, the galleon almost at once lost her sea-way, and both the *Santa Ana* and the *Capitana* began rapidly to come up with her. Meanwhile shouts and shrieks resounded from her decks; her sailors ran about in fear and confusion, but after awhile they appeared to be got into some kind of order, and, as a ball from her boomed across our bows, it was evident that her captain was resolved to fight for his ship.

As our vessels approached, we received a broadside from her which did us both no little harm,

especially to our hulls and rigging, and a shot tore along the forecastle of the *Capitana* in an oblique direction, killing two of my crew and wounding three or four men before it plunged into the sea.

But it was impossible for her to prevent us from coming up alongside of her, and so soon as we had made ourselves fast to her our boarders poured in upon her. And thereupon ensued a battle not more terrible than obstinate, while the faint streaks of a cold and troubled dawn stole upon us, shedding its gleams on the dead and dying as they lay in pools of blood upon her decks.

No quarter was asked or given. Whom the sword or the battle-axe or the spear smote not, him the sea received, for many of the Spaniards, crying that all was lost, threw themselves from the galleon into the water and were drowned. There remained, however, towards the end of the fight a small company of arquebusiers and swordsmen upon the poop, and among them was the captain of the ship, his clothing stained and disordered, and a great, red sword in his hand.

Seeing that no hope remained, he made signs that he wished to surrender, and begged that his life and the lives of those with him might be spared, to which Grace O'Malley straightway assented.

As he walked towards her with his sword in his hand, with the purpose apparently of presenting it to her in token of his submission, he seemed to stumble on the planks, which were slippery with blood, and then, suddenly recovering himself, he

made a mad, swift rush forward, and would have wounded, perhaps killed, my mistress if his intention had not been guessed by Tibbot, who in the very nick of time dashed aside the point of the captain's sword and brained him with his battle-axe.

So incensed were the Irish at this act of treachery that they would show no mercy, and not a soul was left alive.

Thus was the *San Miguel*, as she proved herself to be, taken.

Our first care now was to return to Inisheer, so the three galleons were trimmed as well as was within our power, and our course was shaped for the island, where our three galleys lay, and which was reached in due time without our seeing any more ships of the wine fleet.

And here we remained, among the islands of Arran, for several days, waiting for the other two galleons of which we had heard; but as they did not come into sight, we conjectured that they had either put into some port in another part of Ireland or had been driven on the rocks and wrecked.

Then we bore northwards with the Spanish galleons and our three galleys to a sequestered bay on the coast of Iar-Connaught, where we concealed in caves and other secret places well known to us a portion of the great treasure and of the rich stores that had been found in the merchant ships. Some of their ordnance was put on board the galleys and the rest cast into the sea.

As for the galleons themselves, they were steered

within a mile of the harbour of Galway, in full view of its walls, set on fire, and then sent adrift, blazing, in the bay ; while the prisoners, all save Don de Vilela and Fitzgerald, were landed on the coast, and left to make the best of their way to the city, where on their arrival they published abroad all that Grace O'Malley had done.

And I have not wit enough to describe the amazement and anger of Sir Nicholas, nor the disappointment and vexation of the merchants at the losses they had sustained through the destruction of the wine fleet.

But homeward to Clew Bay we sailed, and little cared we.

CHAPTER XI.

"REDSHANK AND REBEL."

BEFORE we had left the Bay of Galway for the north I had been so constantly occupied with the unlading of the galleons, the disposal of our plunder, and the care and the landing of the prisoners, that I had got no more than glimpses of my mistresses, and then they were seldom alone. For de Vilela and Fitzgerald, although they had a cabin given them on *The Cross of Blood*, were but rarely on my galley during the hours of day, spending most of the time with the two ladies on *The Grey Wolf*.

I perceived they were treated rather as honoured guests than as captives, and I knew that Grace O'Malley held many long and earnest conversations with Don Francisco, the subject of which was ever the same—to wit, what Philip of Spain would do on behalf of the Irish if they rose in rebellion against the Queen.

Now, it mattered not at all to me who was King or Queen of Ireland, whether it was Philip or Elizabeth who should be sovereign of the island, and I had as lief it were the one as the other.

I owed no fealty to England or to Spain, and, being a Macdonald of the Isles, no more to the Queen, King, or Regent of Scotland than could be

forced from us Macdonalds of the West, and that was never over-much. But I was sworn to the service of Grace O'Malley, and if she preferred Spain to England, then it was Spain for me! Yet what I had heard of Philip made me conclude that the Irish would not find him to their liking, as certainly he was not to mine.

For, as a thing of course, there arose this question: If Philip helped the Irish to drive the English out of Ireland, and the English were expelled from the island, what reward would Philip expect to receive in return? Would he not look to become its king? However, so far as I was concerned, the answer lay with my mistress and not with me.

What struck deeper to my heart, so that it was filled with aching every hour, was no such great affair as the possession of a kingdom; yet was it greater to me than all the kingdoms of the world. It was that I began to doubt—nay, to fear—that the dear, sweet, fair woman whom I loved would never be mine.

I had dreamed that I, too, would be a king—her king. Now I saw, or seemed to see, myself uncrowned, disrobed, and beggared, thrust outside the gates of the palace in which she dwelt. But I had never been crowned, nor robed, nor rich, save in visions, and was in truth the veriest beggar on the face of the earth.

Although I was able to be so little with my mistresses, I was not so blind as not to see that de Vilela was entirely fascinated by Eva O'Malley.

She had impressed him from the first, and herein I blamed him not. And the more he saw of her the more her charm worked upon him. That surprised me not; it would have been surprising if it had not.

What stung me to the soul was that Eva was evidently interested in the man, listening absorbedly to everything he said. Many strange and curious tales had he to tell of Spain and of the Moors, and, most of all, of those new lands beyond the seas, inhabited by the Indians, with their magical cities of gold and their wondrous mines of gems and precious stones. Spoke he, too, of the mysteries of those far-off regions; of the lakes and forests and mountains that floated above the clouds, swimming in the silent air; of sacred temples rising tower above tower, exceeding majestical, out of wide plains of gleaming verdure; of their princes and priests and people—all themes as entrancing as any story of chivalry.

Nor lacked he such also, for he could tell of those splendid feats of arms which have made the glory of the world. He was a master, too, of the secrets of courts, and stood high in the councils of his King.

'Twas no wonder that that soft tongue of his wooed and won upon our women, who had so often heard with delight the ruder stories of our bards. Who was I to match myself against this paragon, this paladin, this gentle and perfect knight?

My thoughts were bitter and gloomy, like one walking in the shadow of death, and I had not even

the poor consolation of saying to myself that Don Francisco was nothing more than a squire of dames—at home rather in my lady's bower than in the tented field—for there was that about him which proclaimed him a soldier, and even a veteran of war. Good reason, too, had we to know him before many weeks were past for the bold and ready sword he was.

And when we had returned to Clew Bay, and the galleys were safe in the haven under Knockmore, both de Vilela and Fitzgerald accompanied us to the castle of Carrickahooley, where they were received by my mistresses as if they held them in their kindest regard. Indeed, they were so courteously entertained that the darkness of my spirits deepened, so that I hardly knew myself.

I was in as many moods as there were hours in the day, until I felt a shame of myself and of my weakness born in me. At first, I had chafed and fretted like a spoiled child; then a sullen and savage temper had possessed me, so that I could see that the crews of the galleys observed me, thinking that perhaps the bite of my wounds still hurt and galled; now, recovering myself, I bade myself endure hardness, and bear the lash of the whip of fate, and be a man.

But my dear was very dear to me, and my heart rebelled.

In the meantime I was going backward and forward among the islands and on the mainland, distributing portions of the plunder we had taken from

the galleons to the widows and relatives of those who had fallen in the fighting, as was the custom of Grace O'Malley with her people. Other parts of the spoil were for greater security put into the strong chambers under the castle and elsewhere.

There remained the chest of gold and various vessels and chains and rings of silver and gold, many of them richly jewelled, to be hidden away, and, for this purpose, Grace O'Malley and I went in a boat by ourselves to the Caves of Silence under the Hill of Sorrow. And as I rowed, and considered the while what significance there was in the gold not being restored to those who made claim to being its owners, I experienced a sudden lightening of my spirits.

I reasoned that there must be some doubt in the mind of my mistress of the truth of the story she had been told of the chest of gold, or else she would not have kept it. She could not entirely trust them—de Vilela and Fitzgerald—or she would have returned the money to them. So I thought, but even this comfort was taken from me.

When we had reached the dark, narrow strait that lies between the high cliffs, the grim sentinels which guard the entrance to the caves, the boat shot into it like an arrow, and, without a word, we went swiftly for a distance of half a mile or more—the zip-drip of the oars alone being heard, eerie and startling, as the sound shivered up the black walls of rock.

There, jutting out from them, was the Red Crag,

that is in shape like the head of a bull even to the horns; beyond, a strip of beach, and, at the side of it, a ledge of grey-blue stone; then again the rock walls, ever narrowing and becoming yet more narrow, until they closed in an archway, and we lost the light of day as the boat passed on up the fissure that runs deep into the bowels of the Hill of Sorrow. There was not room for rowing, and I forced the boat along with a hook, Grace O'Malley having lighted a torch.

Then we came to the black, slippery block of stone which seems to close up the passage, but the secret of which was known to us, and to us only.

Here we entered—by what way I may never tell—and were in the first cave of silence, a vast, gloomy, ghostly, dimly-lit hall, with tables and altars and seats carved out of the living rock by hands dead these many thousand years, and on the floor where it was stone and not water, a grey, powdered dust, faintly coloured here and there as with specks of rust—and all that dust was once alive, for these caves are the graves of men.

Out of this vast chamber opened a number of smaller caves, that looked not unlike the cells of monks—and monks of some sort perhaps were they who lived and died here. And everywhere silence—a chill, brooding, fearful, awful silence; and the living rock, hewn and cut; and the floors that were partly stone and partly water; and the grey, rust-spotted dust of death!

In one of these caverns we deposited the treasure

taken from the galleon, hardly speaking except in whispers as we did so, for the hush of the place lay on us like a spell.

I ever felt a creepy horror of these dim, dumb shades, and was glad, when our work was done, to return again to the light of the sun.

It was on our way back to the castle that Grace O'Malley spoke of what was in her mind. Her face was stern and set and full of purpose.

"Ruari," said she, "much has happened since last we visited these caves together with my father, Owen. Now he is gone, and I, his daughter, am proscribed by the English. To what better end could the treasure in these caves be put than to help to drive the English out of Ireland?"

"The treasure is yours," said I slowly, for her words killed my new-found hope, "to do with as you list, and your will is mine. But the English are many, and brave and strong. Remember Shane O'Neil, and how he fell before them. It would be a terrible thing to lose the treasure, and still to have the English in the land."

"We are at war with them in any case," said she. "As for Shane O'Neil, he was unsuccessful because he stood alone, but if all the princes and chiefs of the island unite, the result would surely be different. Then there is the power of Spain to be thrown into the balance on our behalf. The King has promised to send both men and money, if we will but compose our own feuds, and band ourselves together for the one common object."

I answered not a word, but pulled at the oars doggedly.

"Ruari!" she exclaimed. "Why this silence? It is not like you to be so quiet when the sound of battle is in the air."

"Say on," cried I, "I am your servant."

She gazed at me, as one who considered anxiously a thing which puzzled her.

"It is not the treasure, surely?" said she. "When did you care for anything save the taking of it?" Then a light leaped into her eyes, and she laughed more heartily than she had done for days. "You do not like Don Francisco? That is it!" And she laughed again.

"Don Francisco is well enough," said I, but she passed the empty words by.

"Eva is but a young lass," said she, with the hardness gone from her face, so tender had it become all at once, "and the Don, who is certainly a gallant gentleman, and not a love-sick boy, gives her pleasure with his tales and romances. That is all!"

A love-sick boy! That was I, Ruari Macdonald. So Grace O'Malley knew my secret; did Eva know it also?

"Grace O'Malley," said I, resting on the oars, in anguish, for her words brought no solace to me, "my heart is sore."

"Ruari," said she impatiently, "you are nothing but a big boy. Eva had a liking for de Vilela, and so have I, but neither of us has any love for him."

"She does not love him!" cried I doubtfully, yet

with a gladness unspeakable conquering the doubt; "she does not love him!"

"Listen, Ruari!" said my mistress, with a deep, almost melancholy gravity. "If this noble Spaniard love her truly, and she do not him, consider how terrible a misfortune has befallen him. To love greatly, nobly, truly—" and then she paused—"and to find that such a love is unreturned——" and again she stopped. "But love is not for me; these Caves of Silence give me strange thoughts," continued she.

Here was my mistress in a mood that was new to me, and I held my peace, wondering. I had deemed that her thoughts were set on war and her quarrel with the Governor of Galway, forgetting, as I so often did, that she was a woman as well as as our princess and chief.

"Do you not understand," said she again, "that the English will not be satisfied to let our affairs remain as they are? This is not like the strife between two of our septs. Think you that Sir Nicholas is the man to be easily defied? Not so; the matter is no more than begun. He will try to have his revenge, nor will he tarry long over it. See, then, how great an advantage it is for us that de Vilela should have come to us at such a time, with the assistance of the King of Spain. Will not the whole island rise against the Queen of England?"

"To make Philip King of Ireland?" asked I.

"I know not that," replied she; "but the first thing is to expel the English."

Then she told me that Fitzgerald and de Vilela

were soon to set out, making their way across the country to the Earl of Clanrickarde, and, later, to the Earl of Desmond, who was known to be disaffected to the government. By the spring of the following year, it was hoped a general rising would be arranged for, and in the interval soldiers and money would arrive from Spain, and a camp would be formed at a point on the coast, chosen for its ease of access from the open sea, and the readiness with which it could be fortified.

It was much, nay, it was everything, for me to know that Eva O'Malley was not in love with Don Francisco, and it was with very changed feelings that I returned to Carrickahooley.

Yet, though I had my mistress's assurance that all was well, I soon became doubtful and dissatisfied, for time passed and de Vilela made no preparations to depart on his mission to Clanrickarde, while his devotion to Eva was more evident day by day. I asked myself why he lingered, considering the importance of the business on which he was engaged, and Eva was the only reply to that question.

It was when I was in this unhappy frame of mind that one of Richard Burke's messengers, who had come by way of Lough Corrib and Lough Mask from Galway, arrived at the castle, bringing news that Sir Nicholas Malby was on the point of setting out to eat us up.

Beyond this, the man, who was a half-witted creature, and so permitted to wander about at his pleasure, no one doing him hurt because such as he

were counted outside of the course of nature, could tell us little or nothing. Richard the Iron had either not trusted him with more than the barest message, or else had had no opportunity for saying more. It was possible, also, that he had not been able to find out exactly what was intended against us.

The season was still fine and open, and if the Governor so determined it, he could attack us by bringing a force along the shores of the lakes, and then up by the valley of the Eriff. Or, if he designed to assault us from the sea, as he might if he had obtained some of Winter's ships of war, he might purpose to come that way at us. But Burke's messenger could tell us nothing of this.

It seemed more likely that, as the march through Connaught would be slow and tedious, and beset by the dangers which attend the passage of a large body of men through a difficult and little known country, he would strive to reach and assault us by sea.

Therefore, Grace O'Malley commanded me to take *The Cross of Blood*, and, sailing southwards, to keep a look-out for Sir Nicholas and the English vessels of Winter, then in charge of a great part of the fleet of Queen Elizabeth. And, indeed, I was eager to be gone, not only because I was ever ready for action of one kind or another, but also because I felt it would be a relief to the painful uncertainty in which I was with regard to Eva.

I had several times resolved to speak to my dear of the love for her which burned within me, but no fit occasion seemed to arise, and, shy and timid

where she was concerned, I had not had the wit to make one for myself. And I marvelled at myself, being bold, not to say foolhardy, in most matters, and yet not a little of a coward before this one small, fair woman.

Out from Clew Bay put we with all haste, the wind and sea not being amiss, and here for two days we drove before the breeze without coming in sight of a ship of any size. On the third day we lay off shore in a bay not many leagues from Galway, and there the hours passed by, and still there was no sign of Winter's vessels.

I was in two minds, nor could at first settle with myself whether to return to Clew Bay at once, having come to the conclusion that Sir Nicholas was to attack us by land, or to endeavour to enter Galway, and so to discover what he had done, or was about to do.

Now it was of the utmost consequence that we should learn what were the plans of the Governor, if they could be come at in any way, and, having informed my officers of what I proposed, I determined to disguise myself and to enter the city to obtain what we were in search of.

Bidding my people return to Clew Bay if I came not back to the galley in three days at the furthest, I put on the dress of a mendicant friar, and in the night was rowed to the fishing village that is just outside the gates of Galway. Landing, I made my way to the huts, and saw a light burning in one. When I knocked at the door, a man appeared, who,

seeing a priest, as he thought, asked my blessing and invited me to enter.

After a few words, I threw myself down on the earthen floor, and, saying that I was weary and fain would sleep, closed my eyes and waited for the dawn. The fisherman made some rough provision for my comfort, and left me; but I could hear him whispering to his wife, and her replying to something he had said.

When the morning was come, I asked to be shown the house of the nearest priest, whom I found, early as it was, astir and busy with his office. Discovering myself to him—and this I did because I knew all the Irish priests were our friends—I requested him to tell me where Sir Nicholas was.

But he made answer that he went seldom within the walls of the city, as the watch was very strict since the escape of Grace O'Malley, and that no one was suffered to go in or out save only by permission of the marshal. He had heard, however, that since her flight the Irish in Galway and the neighbourhood were regarded with suspicion, and that some of them had been cast into prison. Sir Nicholas, he thought, was still in Galway.

As for Grace O'Malley, she had been proclaimed a traitress by the Governor, and an enemy of the Queen. I myself, Ruari Macdonald, was also proscribed as an abettor of her treasons, and a great reward was offered for the head of the “redshank and rebel,” as Sir Nicholas was pleased to call me.

And these things did not disquiet me exceedingly, but what did was, that I could learn nothing of Richard Burke, whom I desired above all to see. Him, then, had I first to seek out, and, so soon as the gates were open, I set out for Galway, trusting that my priest's dress would satisfy the watch, and that I should be allowed to enter without any trouble or disturbance.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WHISPERING ROCKS.

THE air was cool and the light clear as I stepped briskly along from the village in a northerly direction, up over the high, wooded lands that lie on that side of Galway. From an open space I obtained a view of the town and its harbour, and was well pleased to note that no ship of war, or large vessel of any kind, rode at anchor in the bay. Plainly, the English admiral, Winter, had not yet arrived.

Then I struck across to the east, and so fetched a compass round until I came upon the road that leads to the great gate of the city, and there, no distance off, was the gate, open. Two carts, going to market with provisions, were passing in, and their drivers were stopped by the watch and interrogated.

Now, I had no overweening confidence in the completeness of my disguise, and it was evident that what the village priest had told me was true as to the care exercised in the admission of anyone within the walls, so I drew off and tarried awhile, to see if chance would not put some opportunity into my hands.

I reflected, too, with perturbation, that I had no weapon with me except a dagger—the robe I was wearing making it impossible to conceal a sword

beneath it. But then, again, came the thought that, however well I might have been armed, I was but one man with one life, and that I was about to adventure it in a city full of my enemies. Yet is there that in the mere grip of the cold cross of a sword that keeps the blood a flowing fire in one's veins, and I regretted that I had had to leave my good blade behind.

While I was thus communing with myself, I saw two Franciscans approach, going towards the gate, and I straightway resolved to join them. They were talking loudly, as if there were a bone of contention between them, and, when they observed me, they both, in one breath, as it were, addressed me, each one asking me to give a decision in his favour on the subject they differed about, which was—Whether St. Patrick were an Irishman or not?

I answered craftily that I should like to hear the arguments on both sides of the question, and requested them to choose which of them should be the first speaker. Whereupon, they halted in the road, disputing which should have the preference, and were like to have spent the morning before they had settled this, as neither would yield to the other, if I had not made a movement towards the gate.

"Sir," said I, turning to one of them—they had now ranged themselves on either side of me as we walked on—"what say you? That the holy Patrick was——?"

"I say he was an Irishman," burst in the other, on my left, before I had finished the sentence.

"An Irishman!" exclaimed the Franciscan on my right, "an Irishman! Not he. He was a Scot!"

"I say he was an Irishman!"

"And I maintain he was a Scot!"

"An Irishman!"

"A Scot!"

Their voices rose into shoutings and roarings, as they glared across me with angry eyes.

"St. Patrick was never born in Ireland," cried the one.

"St. Patrick was never born anywhere else," retorted the other.

"I tell you, by the Mass, that St. Patrick was a Scot."

"I tell you, by St. Peter, he was not."

And thus they wrangled until we had reached the gate, where I perceived the noise they made had already attracted the notice of the watch. Without appearing to pay any attention to the soldiers, I nodded now to the Franciscan on my right, and now to him on my left, as if I followed their words intently.

All my senses, however, were on the stretch, and my heart throbbed and fluttered in my breast, for the danger was great.

"'Tis Father Ambrose and Father Gregory," I heard one of the soldiers say, "and another of the fathers." Then he glanced at me inquiringly, but only asked, "To the Church of St. Nicholas, fathers?"

"Yes," was the reply, and we were passing in

when an officer of the Governor's came down the street, and, scowling at us, bade us halt.

"Whither go ye?" he demanded gruffly.

"To the Church of St. Nicholas," said we as with one voice, for I had made up my mind to go thither also.

"There be too many priests in Galway already," said he, with stern-knit brows, "and, had I my way, I should hang ye all. Know ye these men?" he called to the watch.

I held my breath. Father Ambrose and Father Gregory they appeared to know, but as to myself, what would they say?

"Yes, sir," said the soldier who had spoken before, and as soon as I heard this, I moved on, the Franciscans accompanying me, and beginning their dispute over again.

And so on we walked to the Church of St. Nicholas, while I could scarcely credit having thus fortunately made my entrance into Galway. Having arrived at the church, I directed my steps to the shrine of my patron saint, where, on my knees, with more than the devoutness of many a monk, I offered him my gratitude for his favour and protection, and implored a continuance of the same.

Thus engaged, I had not at once observed that someone had come up behind me, and was kneeling two or three paces away. When I looked up I saw the figure of a woman, but her face I could not see for the shadow of a pillar that intervened.

Somehow, the form seemed familiar, and when

she rose up from praying and turned to go, I was startled to find myself gazing at Sabina Lynch. She glanced at me curiously, but, beholding only a friar, passed on sedately out of the building, little thinking at the moment that she had ever been carried, and that not too gently nor so long ago, in that friar's arms.

To keep up the character I had assumed I began begging, according to the manner of the order of mendicants, from door to door, so soon as I had quitted the church, hoping in this way to light upon someone from whom I might safely ask if Richard Burke were lodging in the town.

And in this it appeared altogether probable that I should have no success, for in many instances I was driven from the doors of the people without ceremony, or paid no heed to whatever. Indeed, the whole town seemed to be agog with something, and, as the streets were now filled with soldiers marching in companies, it was easy to be seen that there was good reason for the excitement.

When I inquired of a man who had given me an alms, and who was of a friendly disposition, what was the cause of all this moil and stir, he replied that surely I must be a stranger not to know that Sir Nicholas was bringing an army together in the town with which he meant to punish the rebels of Connaught.

"What rebels?" asked I innocently.

"That pestilent and notable woman," said he, "Grace O'Malley, and all her tribe of robbers and murderers and pirates."

Then he told me how she had destroyed the wine fleet of Galway, and so had come near to ruining the trade of the port.

"She is a devil," quoth he, and he crossed himself, "and the Governor will kill her and her people."

"A woman!" cried I, with a great show of being astonished beyond measure.

"Ay, a woman," said he, "but she must be a devil." And he crossed himself again. Then he added: "If she be not the very devil in the shape of a woman, there is with her a man, a giant—a great, strong giant—whom she calls her brother, but who is said to have come out of the sea, and is no man at all, but a devil too. Some say he is a Redshank of the Scots, but I tell you he is a devil too."

And thus the fellow maundered on, while I found some trouble in restraining myself from bursting into laughter in his face. Having, however, thanked him civilly for his alms and information, I gave him my blessing—a devil's blessing—and so left him.

We were devils!

What, then, were those who thought nothing of breaking a safe-conduct, or of poisoning the wine at banquets to which they had invited their victims as loving guests? Yet the first had happened in the case of my mistress, and the second had been the fate of many an Irish chief.

We were devils, and so to be feared! It was no

such bad thing at that time and in that land to be counted as devils, for men who had no fear of God before their eyes, nor of his saints, were afraid of devils.

I had now come to the tavern that is under the sign of the Golden Eagle, and from inside proceeded the sound of eating and of drinking, of festivity and of mirth. Entering in, I was about to beg for alms, when I saw among the company a man whom I recognised as one of the Mayo Burkes, a gallowglass of the MacWilliam's. Him I at once addressed, incautiously enough, asking if his master were well, and where I would find him, as I had a message for his private ear.

"Richard the Iron," said he, "is lodged in the North Street; and who are you, father, that know not that?"

"I have been there," said I, lying boldly, "but he is away from the house."

"If he be not at the mansion of the Joyces," said he, "then I know not where he is."

So Richard Burke was at the mansion of the Joyces in the North Street. Here was good news indeed, and, having said some fair words to the man, I went out of the tavern; but when I reached the North Street I found that my falsehood had this much of truth in it—that Richard Burke was not there. I sat down on a bench in the courtyard of the mansion, and waited impatiently for his return. Tiring of this, I walked up the street towards the Little Gate, and whom should I meet

on the way but Richard Burke riding with Sabina Lynch.

Well did I recall what Richard Burke had said to me some weeks before, when he had come secretly to *The Cross of Blood*. He had declared that Sabina Lynch loved him, but that he only cared for Grace O'Malley. Yet, as I looked at them, it seemed to me as if he were paying Mistress Lynch no little court, and they appeared to take pleasure in each other's society.

But when I thought of the messenger he had sent to Carrickahooley, and of his service, though unavailing, to us before, I conceived that he was playing a double part, holding that love and war, perhaps, justified any means so long as the end were gained. And, for that matter, I, the false friar, was no better than a cheat myself.

I was determined to get speech with him without further delay—the feeling of impatience was so strong upon me—and, as I was casting about in what way I should accomplish this, Sabina Lynch tossed me a piece of silver as an alms, while I was yet three ells' length from the horses.

“Take that for the poor, father,” cried she merrily.

It happened that the coin after it had struck the ground, rolled in front of Richard Burke's horse, and I rushed forward to pick it up before it was trampled into the dust. I also trusted that under cover of this action I should be able to say a few

words which would make me known to him, without being perceived by his companion.

As I stepped into the street, he was compelled to rein in his horse, and then to pass by the side of me.

"What a greedy, clumsy friar he is!" laughed Sabina Lynch.

In truth, I was as clumsy as clumsy could be, for as I drew myself up and tried to stand erect I hit my shoulder against Richard Burke's foot, whereupon he stopped.

"Father," said he, good-humouredly, "have you no care for yourself? Then, prithee, have a care for me."

And he smiled; but when he had looked into my face, and had met my eyes, I saw the blood suddenly leave his cheeks, and knew that he had penetrated my disguise.

He gave so great a start that his horse leaped up under him, and, as it did so, the friar's cowl, which covered my head and partially hid my face, was thrown back, and there stood I, Ruari Macdonald, disclosed and discovered, before Sabina Lynch.

She gazed from the one to the other of us in silence, then, striking her horse violently, galloped off, exclaiming: "Treason, treason!"

Richard Burke was in a maze.

"Ruari!" he gasped, and could say no more.

"I have come to Galway," said I quickly, "that I might have knowledge of the Governor's inten-

tions against us. This is no place for us now," cried I, to rouse him, for he was like one that dreamed, "come, come with me before the hue and cry is raised."

And I seized the bridle of his horse and turned its head, and led it towards the Little Gate.

"Not that way," said he wildly. "I have just come from thence."

Then he gathered himself and his wits together.

"The Great Gate is best. Ay, this is no place now for me any more than it is for you. Well said you that. We will go together; but let us not go too swiftly, otherwise the watch, suspecting something is wrong, will not let us pass. We have a few minutes to spare before the gates can be closed. Do you walk a little way behind me."

I had replaced the cowl about my head, and, hardly knowing whether to be glad or sorry at what had fallen out, marched at a rapid pace after him up the street of the Great Gate.

Richard Burke was well known to the watch, and no objection was made to our passing out. As long as we were within sight of the walls we went at a walk, but when a turn of the road had hid them from us, I grasped the saddle-cloth and ran beside the horse, which its rider now urged along at the top of its speed.

We had gone about two miles, and had gained an eminence partly sheltered by trees, when, looking back, we saw the figures of horsemen spurring after us out of the city. On we sped again, until I could

run no more. Then I besought Burke to leave me as I was spent and blown. But this he would not hearken to at first.

"It will be a strange thing," said I, "if I cannot conceal myself somewhere in the trees and bushes, or among the rocks, for the night. In the morning I will make my way back to the galley."

And I persuaded him to ride on towards his own territory, but not before he had told me that Sir Nicholas had drawn a force of a hundred men from Athlone, everyone of whom was a trained and hardened soldier, and with these, his own men, and the gallowglasses of Sir Morrough O'Flaherty of Aughnacore, who had promised to support him, was about to set out at once for our overthrow.

The Governor was terribly enraged against us, and in his anger at the destruction of the wine fleet had sworn he would make an end of us all. His wrath burned not only against Grace O'Malley, but against many others of the Irish, and there had been such a killing and a hanging of those who were thought hostile to the government as had never before been seen or heard of in Galway.

Richard Burke had only escaped because of his friendship with the Mayor and his daughter Sabina Lynch, but his every act was spied upon.

"I remained in the city for no other reason," he declared, "than to see if I could not afford some help to you in one way or another."

As he departed, he said, as he rung my hand, "I shall cast in my lot with yours, and, if it can

be done in the time left to us, I shall bring all the Burkes of Mayo to your assistance. Should you reach Carrickahooley first, tell your mistress that."

Then he swung himself again into the saddle, and was gone.

He was hardly out of sight, when I heard the sound of hoofs beating on the road, and creeping in through the bushes that lined a small stream by the wayside I laid me down to rest, and soon I was listening to the voices of the men in pursuit of us as they drew near. They made no pause, but swept on past the spot where I lay.

I was about to emerge from my place of concealment, when again the tramp of horses fell upon my ear, and, looking out, I saw Sir Nicholas and several of his officers come riding slowly along. They stopped quite close to me, and, dismounting, made a survey of the land all around, but, my star favouring me, they moved to the further side of the stream.

"Let the camp be pitched here," said Sir Nicholas, "and do you remain until the men come up."

I guessed that he had been told of my presence in Galway, and had immediately ordered the soldiers to set out to catch me so that we should have no advantage from our being warned of his purpose.

My position was now one of extreme peril; I was cut off from returning to my galley; and I could see nothing for it but to remain where I was until the soldiers had gone on on their journey, unless I took the chances of the darkness.

There I lay, and, as the night fell, the men of Sir Nicholas marched up and lit their watch-fires not more than a stone's throw from where I hid. For hours, not daring to move, I heard them singing and talking and jesting with each other. When, at length, silence came upon the sleeping camp, I stole as softly as I could out of the bushes, and moving on, like a cat, so that each step of mine was no more noticed than a puff of wind, I managed to gain the road that leads past Oorid and Sindilla at the foot of the mountains. I walked fast, and sometimes ran, until the day broke, when I turned aside, and, having sought for and found a dry cave on the side of a hill, fell down utterly exhausted, and ere long was in a deep slumber.

I was awakened many hours later, for it was dark again, by a strange sort of cheeping noise at my very ears.

I started up, and the noise ceased; I lay down, and the sound began once more. As I listened, my face to the rocky floor of the cavern, I fancied I could distinguish words, but, as it were, coming from a great way off.

Now, thoroughly aroused, I listened yet more earnestly, and I made out that there were two or three voices, and that the sound of them was not coming from the inside of the cave, nor yet from the outside, but seemed to issue, like a thin whistle, through the rock itself.

I moved stealthily towards the far end, and, lying down again prone, applied my ear to the ground.

I now heard quite distinctly, the words being audible, though faint, and with an extraordinary effect of still coming from an immense distance.

I then understood I was in one of the chambers of the Whispering Rocks as they are called, for a wonder of nature has so constructed them that it is possible to hear through them, when all around is still, whatever is said within these caverns. And how this miracle comes to pass I know not, but I had often heard of it; otherwise I might have thought that these sounds came from the spirits of the mountain, and so might not have discovered the vile plot that had been hatched for our ruin.

For, as the voices grew more and more clear, I found myself listening to the story of how these men who were speaking were to present themselves at the castle of Carrickahooley in advance of the English army, and, having gained admittance on the plea that they were fleeing to Grace O'Malley for protection, were treacherously to betray her and the castle into the hands of the Governor by secretly opening the gate as soon as the attack began.

I gripped my dagger in impotent rage, for, placed as I was, I could do nothing. After a time the voices ceased, and, moving noiselessly to the mouth of the cave, I saw that the night was clear and starry, and, feeling refreshed by my long repose, I made on towards Ballanahinch, which I reached in the morning, and where I obtained milk and the flesh of a kid from the wife of one of the kernes,

who took me for a wandering priest, and gladly supplied my wants.

For two days and the greater part of two nights I toiled over the mountains and through the forests, seeing no indication of the English, until I came to the fiord of the Killery, where some of our own people dwelt under Muilrea. From thence they brought me round to Clew Bay in a fishing boat, and I was back again at Carrickahooley, more dead than alive from the fatigues I had undergone, inured though I was to all kinds of hardness.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SURPRISE.

As I stepped from the boat on to the face of the rock, which forms a natural quay on one side of the small harbour on the sea-front of the castle, both Grace and Eva O'Malley, who had seen me coming across the waters, met me and asked how I fared.

I was not so spent with the travail of my wearisome journey as not to be conscious of a novel sort of shyness on the part of my dear, who seemed rather to hang back behind her foster-sister, and not to be so open and outspoken with me as formerly. With some bitterness of soul I attributed this change of manner to her thoughts being engrossed with de Vilela—so little was I able to read the maid's mind.

But it was no fitting time for either the softness or the hardness of love, and my first care was to relate all that had chanced since I had seen them last.

Great was their astonishment at the way in which Sabina Lynch came again into the tale of our fortunes, and I could see, from a certain fierceness with which Grace O'Malley alluded to her, that a heavy reckoning was being laid up against her by my mistress. Eva, however, appeared to be more struck

by the hopelessness of Sabina Lynch's affection for Richard Burke, and found it in her heart to pity her.

When I gave Richard Burke's message to Grace O'Malley, she rejoiced exceedingly thereat, and from that moment—at least, so it seems to me looking backward to those days—she began to esteem him more highly than heretofore, and to cherish some feeling of tenderness for him, her enmity against Sabina Lynch, though she would not acknowledge that there could be any rivalry between them, helping, perhaps, thereto not a little.

And it appeared to me as a thing curious in itself, and not readily explained, except by saying that my mistress was not free from weakness, that she should have shown a compassion, as she had done when she had spoken to me some time before of de Vilela, for the hapless love of a man, and had nothing of the kind for Sabina Lynch.

Whatever were her thoughts on these matters, what she said afforded no indication of them, for, so soon as she had heard that the MacWilliam purposed to bring over from the country of the Lower Burkes, as they were called, to distinguish them from the Burkes of Clanrickarde, his gallowglasses to her aid against the English, she at once proceeded to count up how many swords and spears were at his command. Moreover, she regarded, she said, his rising against the Governor as a splendid and sure sign of what would shortly take place over the whole of Ireland.

Continuing the tale of my adventures, I related

the conversation I had overheard in the case of the mysterious Whispering Rocks, and my mistress ordered that when the men, whose council of treachery I had become acquainted with in so strange a way, made their appearance, they should forthwith be admitted into the castle, as if we had had no knowledge of their intended perfidy, and that they should not be dealt with as traitors until she deemed that time was ripe for it.

And now, having been thus forewarned of what was in store for her on the part of Sir Nicholas, Grace O'Malley immediately set about placing the castle in a position of secure defence. To this end, several pieces of the ordnance which had been taken from the captured galleons of the wine fleet, and which had been put on board *The Grey Wolf* and *The Winged Horse*, now at Clare Island, were brought across Clew Bay, and mounted on the walls and towers of Carrickahooley, while the gates and the other more vulnerable parts of its fortifications were strengthened. In all these matters we were much assisted by Don Francisco, who had had a large experience of sieges, and was familiar with the onfalls and the outfalls and the other incidents of such warfare. The Spaniard and I therefore were together more than we had ever been before, and towards me he carried himself like the courteous and knightly man he was, while I strove to pattern myself upon him.

That he loved Eva O'Malley I was in no doubt. Indeed, when he assured me, as he frequently did,

how glad he was that he had not been able to leave the castle as he had intended doing, and how well pleased he was to have an opportunity of espousing our quarrel with the English, I understood that it was a delight to him to be near her in this our time of peril, for was not that what I also told myself continually?

That he bore a hatred towards England was true, but his love for Eva, as he was to prove, was something far greater than his hatred of the English. Yet already, though I knew it not then, he must have been well aware that she was not for him. But no sign of grief or disappointment did he allow to appear, albeit, always grave, as is the Spanish manner, he seemed still graver before the assault began—and this, when I observed it, I took to mean that he considered our situation was such as called for seriousness.

Whilst our preparations to repel the English were being made, some days elapsed, and, on the fifth of them, Calvagh O'Halloran brought *The Cross of Blood* into port at Clare Island, where to his great relief, not knowing what had been my fate in Galway, he was told that I was before him at Carrickahooley.

Meanwhile, tidings were being brought us by bands and families of kernes and peasants, fleeing before the enemy, that the English were approaching. And, as they marched northwards through Connaught, the days were red with blood and the nights with fire.

Everywhere their presence was marked by the smoke and flame of homesteads wantonly burned, and by the slaughter of all who fell into their hands, neither the old nor the decrepit, nor the nursing mother, nor the tender maiden, nor the sucking child being left alive!

Among the despairing wretches who flocked to the castle for protection it was impossible to single out the plotters, whose knavery they had themselves unwittingly disclosed in the Whispering Rocks, for everyone apparently was in the same evil case. A close watch, however, was kept on all the men who came in, and who were retained within the walls to help in the defence, while the women and children were conveyed to Clare Island, where they would be in safety.

Don Francisco dropped a half hint that Eva might better be sent to Clare Island until the fortune of battle had declared itself, but I knew that this would seem to her to be of the nature of deserting us at a time of crisis, and so the proposition was carried no further.

And all through the siege she moved a bright, winsome, and always cheerful presence, generally attended by the Wise Man, Teige O'Toole, who constituted himself her body-servant, and who, during this period, uttered no prophecies of evil, but cheered and sustained us with the certainty of victory.

At length, on the tenth day after my return to Carrickahoeley, our spies came in from their lairs

in the forests and hills with the news that the English army was camped two leagues away, and that it appeared to be the intention of its leaders to spend the night there. The spies described the army as an immense host, there being more than three hundred well-armed soldiers, besides a great swarm of the gallowglasses of Sir Murrough O'Flaherty of Aughnanure, who himself had accompanied the Governor.

When I inquired eagerly if Sir Nicholas had any ordnance, the spies averred that they had seen none. And, whether the difficulty of dragging heavy pieces through Connaught had been found insurmountable, or, strong in numbers and relying on the terror inspired by the name of the English, he had resolved to dispense with them altogether, I knew not; but to my mind the absence of these engines of war more than made up for his superiority over us in men.

Doubtless, his action in this respect was founded on the confidence he entertained that we were about to be betrayed to him by the traitors within the castle itself, nor could he dream that the galleries of the Whispering Rocks had given up his secrets to me.

All that night the guard, of which I was in command, stood to their arms upon the battlements; but there was not a sound save such as ever comes from the sleeping earth or the never-sleeping sea. The morning dawned still and fair, and the sun rose out of the world, tinting with a fresh bloom the

slopes of the distant hills now purpling with the bursting heather, and changing the thin, vaporous mist that lay over land and water below them, into one great gleaming sheen of silver.

All that night, too, our spies lay concealed in the woods, and noted every movement within the English camp; and now, as the day advanced, they came in to report that Sir Nicholas was marching down to the seashore. By noon he had established himself in and about the Abbey of Burrishoole, no regard being had to the sacredness of the building. And here he halted for the rest of the day, probably being greatly surprised that we had not so far offered any resistance to his approach.

Now this ancient religious house stands on a rocky height looking across the small bay that is next to that on the edge of which the castle is built, and therefore the distance between the enemy and ourselves was so inconsiderable that it behoved us to be constantly on the alert.

In the evening, then, when the night-watch was posted on the walls and about the gate, I doubled the number of the guard, choosing such men, and those chiefly from my own crew of *The Cross of Blood*, as were of proved endurance and courage.

De Vilela had proffered his services, as my second in command, and I had given him charge of a picked company whose station was beside the gate of the drawbridge—that is, the gate on the landward side of Carriekahooley.

Grace O'Malley herself saw that everything was

disposed according to her mind before she withdrew to the apartments of the women in the main tower. But well did I know that it was not to sleep that she had gone. She had now attired herself in the mantle, leather-quilted jack, and armour of an Irish gentleman, and her eyes were full of the fierce light of battle; but, deeming it likely to increase the confidence of her people if they saw her retire according to her usual custom, she had left us to ourselves.

I was leaning upon the edge of the parapet, gazing into the deepening darkness of the night, and musing on many things, when one of my officers came up, and informed me that among those who had fled to us for refuge from the English were certain kernes who passionately begged to be permitted to share the night-watch, being consumed with zeal against the enemy.

Knowing the treachery that was contemplated, Grace O'Malley had had all the refugees confined during the previous night within the buildings of the castle, and not suffered to go abroad except in the daytime, and now when I heard the request I felt a certainty that the men who made it could be no other than those whose voices I had overheard, and who were the traitors in the pay of the Governor.

As it was above all things necessary they should have no suspicion that we had any knowledge of their purpose, I gave my officer an answer in an offhand manner, saying I would see these kernes in

a little while, and, if I found them likely to make good soldiers, might add them to the guard.

Debating with myself whether I should at once go and tell my mistress what I thought, and also, if I was correct in my surmise, what was the best way in which to proceed, so that the discomfiture of these men might be complete, the night grew apace, and still I had come to no decision.

Suddenly, a slight, scarcely - seen motion — so slight, so scarcely-seen that it might have been caused by the vagrant breath of a passing breeze, only there was a perfect calm—seemed to the keenness of my sea-trained vision to make itself felt by a sort of tremulousness in that breadth of shadow that lay opposite me under the cold gleam of the stars, which I knew to be the side of the hill on which was the abbey.

Sounds, too, there came, but so faintly that I could not disentangle them from the ordinary voices of the night. Then, as I strained my eyes and ears, both sound and motion faded away as in a dream. I waited and watched for some minutes, but all was as silent as death.

Thinking I might have been mistaken, I went down from the battlements, and calling to the officer who had spoken of the wish of the refugee kernes, I bade him bring them to me in a chamber that served as a guard-room.

As I entered, a solitary wolf-call came howling through the air, and then, as the kernes came in, there was a second.

The first wolf-call had startled me, for surely, with such a host near us, it was a strange thing for a wolf to be thus close at hand; but when I heard the second one there was no doubt left in my mind. These calls were no other than the calls of human wolves signalling each other.

So, bidding the men to be kept in the guard-room till I returned, I went to the gate, and told de Vilela that I conjectured the enemy was stealing upon us in the darkness to take us by surprise, expecting that their allies within our walls would have so contrived as to make the way easy for them, and I said I thought I could now put my hand on these very men.

When I saw the kernes again, they affirmed that they were three men of the O'Flahertys of Ballanahinch, between whom and the O'Malleys there was a friendship of long-standing. Now, between these O'Flahertys and the O'Flahertys of Aughnashure there was a desperate family feud, and their tale was not lacking in plausibleness. They appeared to be very eager to be employed against the enemy, and implored to be sent to help to guard the gate, which was the weakest part of our defences.

I replied that it was for me, and not for them, to say where they should be put, but that their prayer would be granted. As for the gate being the weakest part of our defences, how could they say that? Whereupon they were silent. However, I had now determined what I was to do, so I bade them begone to the company of de Vilela, who had no

difficulty in understanding that they were the knaves of whom I had spoken to him.

A short time afterwards I saw the Spaniard, and communicated to him my plan, which was that he was to appear to give the kernes every opportunity of carrying out their designs, but, without seeming to do so, was not to lose sight of them for one moment, and that thus he would probably be in a position to defeat their intent.

To speak the truth, I did not see how I could act in any other manner, yet I was very uneasy, and, as the event showed, not without reason.

For I had been no more than back again at my place in the black corner of the parapet, when I heard a loud shouting at that angle of the wall next the sea, and the sound of blows. Running thither, I saw the dark forms of men climbing from ladders to the top of the wall, and the pale glitter of steel striking steel.

In an instant the whole castle rang with the cries of the alarmed guard, as they hurried from all sides to the point of attack, and torches blazed out from the tower. The glare from these lights fell weirdly on the forms of our people as they pressed on to mount the parapet, yelling with lusty throats the war-cry of the O'Malleys. I stopped and looked down on them, and as the dancing torches flew their flags of red and orange flame, now this way, now that, I noticed among the crowd the faces of two of the kernes whom I had sent to de Vilela.

To make certain I looked again. There assuredly

they were, pushing on, and pointing to the place of assault, and shouting more loudly even than their neighbours. I asked myself why they had left the guard at the gate, and at once concluded that they must have slipped away in the confusion, for de Vilela was not likely to have given them permission.

What was their object?

And where was the third man? I could only see two.

There they were—the two whom I now plainly discovered stepping forward, apparently as keen for the fight as any of ourselves, making straight for the parapet, and *helping to draw others along with them away from the gate of the drawbridge.*

Was that it?

This thought came like the quick flashing of an inward light, and then was succeeded by another.

If this were so, then it followed that the attack we were engaged in repelling was a mere feint meant to deceive us, and that the real assault would be made—probably at the gate—while our attention was held elsewhere. In any case there were sufficient, as I conceived, of our gallowglasses now upon the walls to beat back the enemy, and I hastened toward the gate.

As I moved forward I was met by de Vilela and most of his company, and when I stopped and asked him why he had quitted his post, he replied that it was in obedience to a request from me which he had just received. Now, I had sent no such request, and

the fear which had sprung up within me was at once confirmed, as it was evident that he had been duped by a false message, the result being that the gate was left nearly unprotected.

"Come with me," I said, at the same time telling him quickly how the matter stood, and of the dread that possessed me. Such of our men as I encountered on the way I also bade turn about and follow me. Nor were we a moment too soon.

Drawing nearer, we could hear the rattle and the clank of the heavy chains of the drawbridge as it was being lowered, and the creaking of the ponderous gate as it swung inwards on its heavy hinges. The flames of torches blazing from the wide doorway of the main tower flashed upon the steel jacks and the gauntlets of English soldiers, dim-fitting in the half-gloom of the opening mouth of the gate.

The traitor had done his work and had done it well; yet it passes me, even to this day, to understand how he had been able to accomplish his end thus so swiftly and thoroughly.

"O'Malley! O'Malley!" I cried in a great voice that rang out far above all the din and disorder of the night, so that it reached the ear of my princess, who now came hurrying on along with some of the gentlemen of her household and a body of swordsmen.

"O'Malley! O'Malley!"

Behind me the pure deep tones of my mistress's cry mingled with the hoarse, harsh accents of her people.

“O'Malley ! O'Malley !”

Fierce and terrible beyond all power of words to express was the hardly human cry.

With a couple of bounds I had reached our foes. The glimmer of a sword passed by me, and I parried the point of a spear thrust at my breast. Then I felt my knees gripped, and I tripped over upon the body of the man who held me. As I stumbled, my weapon falling from my hand, I caught a glimpse of de Vilela standing over me, his long sword playing like lightning, holding the enemy in check.

There was a rush of feet, and across me and the man beneath me, as across a wall, did the battle rage.

I had fallen with my whole weight upon the man who had seized my legs, and I heard him gasp and sob and try for breath as he lay underneath.

As I felt along his form for his throat, I noticed that he wore no armour, and my fingers became as steel when I realised that this was no other, could be no other, than the traitor who had opened the gate. Whoever or whatever he was, his secret died with him there, for I did not relax my grasp upon his neck until I was well assured that I had twisted and broken it.

And when in the morning we found the body amongst a heap of slain, it was trampled out of all semblance of human shape, but not so as not to show the sign of the broken neck.

How I managed to roll myself out of that press and coil I cannot tell, but yet somehow I did it, and all the while I was strangely conscious that

de Vilela's sword watched and warded over me, so that I escaped with my life. This affair of mine took not so long in the doing as in the telling of it, and when I had struggled to my feet he was in front of me—"Santiago! Santiago!" on his lips, as that long sword of his sang its songs of death. Plucking my battle-axe from my girdle I stepped to his side.

And now about us were my mistress and her fiery swordsmen, mad with rage and thirsting for blood. With wild screams we fell upon and fought back the Englishmen, who stubbornly contested every foot of ground, until we hurled them broken across the bridge, pursuing them for some distance beyond the castle. Then, facing round, we attacked from the rear those who had attempted to enter by scaling the walls; and perhaps some escaped in the darkness, but of those who were seen by us not one was spared.

So, favourably for us, our first fight with the English came to a close.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GATE OF FEARS.

DURING what of the night remained we continued under arms, expecting that the attack might be renewed, but the morning—another sunny splendour—came, and we were undisturbed. We were now in a better position to estimate what had occurred, and the peril from which we had so narrowly escaped.

The number of our dead and wounded was not great, but among the latter was Fitzgerald, who had been by the side of Grace O'Malley in the fight for the gate. Eva O'Malley, along with Teige O'Toole, the Wise Man, who was also a mediciner, and skilled in the use of herbs and simples, ministered to the wants and relieved the pangs of the sufferers, as far as lay within her power.

And as she passed in and out among them, her passing seemed to me, and to others I doubt not, as the passing of an angel. My mistress and de Vilela were unhurt, and I had nothing more than some bruises to show for my share in the battle.

Neither among the killed nor the wounded could the two traitorous kernes be seen, and I feared that they had contrived to make good their flight, a thing which did not appear improbable considering the darkness and confusion of an assault by night.

However, I had every portion of the castle searched and scrutinised with the utmost care, and finally the knaves were found hiding in a storeroom, which held a large quantity of loose corn, and there, amongst the grain, they were discovered nearly suffocated.

They had deserved no mercy and they were shown none. Desirous of knowing who they in reality were, and of obtaining any information they possessed of the purposes of the Governor, I ordered that they should be taken into one of the underground dungeons, and put to the question.

But they were stout of heart, being, as I think, no common men, so that torture even failed to worry their secrets from them. When Grace O'Malley heard that they could be forced to disclose nothing, she directed that they should be taken and hanged from a great gallows-beam, that sprang out from the summit of the tower, and which could be plainly descried by the English from Burrishoole.

No sooner had the fight for the gate come to an end, than I became greatly disturbed in my mind as to the debt I felt myself to be owing to de Vilela, for, had it not been for that marvellous sword-play of his I had never come out of the fray alive.

That was the kind of debt in payment of which a man might almost give his all, even life itself. In what way was I to discharge it? I consoled myself with the thought that the chances of warfare might provide me with the opportunity, but if not—what then?

The matter lay heavy upon me, and that Don

Francisco was my rival for Eva's love, and, as I was more than half disposed to imagine, my successful rival did not make the burden of it the lighter to bear. But one thing I could do, and that, the business of the perfidious knaves being despatched, I did. I sought him out, and, offering him my hand, thanked him with such words as flowed from a full, if troubled breast, for the great service he had done me.

"Señor," said I impulsively, "I believe that I am indebted to you for the greatest service one man can render another."

His attitude was that of protest, nay, of entreaty, that I should say no more.

Now I have written to little purpose if I have not made it evident that de Vilela was my superior in every way save with respect to my strength of body, which was the one special gift God had given me. I had acknowledged the fact to myself, although, being human, not perhaps ungrudgingly. As I looked into his face, whatever poor, paltry feeling I had nourished against him was swept away by a wave of strong emotion.

"Yes, señor," said I, "how am I to thank you? But for you—I would have perished. What am I to say? What can I do?"

"Señor Ruari," cried he, in that soft, quiet way of his, "between soldiers, brothers-in-arms, there is no debt."

"Señor," said I——

"Be generous, Señor Ruari," exclaimed he, "and say not a word more," and he smiled somewhat

wistfully and sadly. "We are friends, at any rate, whate'er befall, are we not?"

"By God's wounds!" swore I.

And we clasped hands again, and so parted.

The day which followed that night of stir was one of quiet at the castle, and its very peacefulness seemed to me well-nigh intolerable. But we learned from our spies, and could to some extent see for ourselves, that there was a great commotion in the English camp, indicating the arrival of fresh troops.

By the evening, Sir Nicholas had so disposed his forces that we were completely hemmed in on the land side, and our spies had to be withdrawn within the walls. The sea was still open to us, and much I wondered that the Governor did not take this more into his account, for so long as we could get to our galleys and procure food by way of Clew Bay, we could laugh at him and bid him defiance.

But I might have been sure that Sir Nicholas was too experienced a soldier not to know well what he was about.

Another night and another day dragged themselves slowly away, and the Governor moved not from the positions he had taken up. There he lay all round us, just out of reach of our ordnance, of which we gave him a taste from time to time, so that he should keep his distance; there he lay, inactive, waiting, expectant—but of what, or, of whom?

These were the questions Grace O'Malley discussed with de Vilela and myself, and the answers to them did not present themselves at once.

"Can it be," asked my mistress—and her words showed the direction in which her thoughts were turning "that Sir Nicholas has heard Richard Burke is coming with all the men of Mayo behind him to our aid, and that he has decided to engage him before attacking us?"

"He is perhaps making some engines with which he hopes to batter down your walls," said de Vilela.

"Our ordnance will prevent that," said I.

"I think the Governor must himself expect to receive ordnance from some quarter," said de Vilela, "otherwise the success of the siege he must know is impossible."

Grace O'Malley and I looked at each other, the same thought in our minds. There was only the one way by which there was any probability of his obtaining heavy pieces, and that was over sea.

Did Sir Nicholas reckon on the support of a heavy ship of war, and was he now quietly looking for its arrival? Had he foreseen, or, at least, provided against the failure of the plot of the kernes?

That seemed very likely, and the more I thought of it the more likely did it seem. I now realised, as I had not done before, the seriousness of our situation.

"That must be it," said Grace O'Malley. "That must be it. He is not a man given to slackness, but he is perfectly aware that he can now effect nothing unless he has cannon, and so he tarries until his ordnance comes. Doubtless he has arranged that a war-vessel shall meet him here, and, if that is how the matter stands, it may arrive very soon."

"What you have conjectured," said de Vilela, "will, I think, prove to be correct." And I also said that her words expressed my own opinion.

Now, the three great galleys lay in the harbour at Clare Island, and as Grace O'Malley had withdrawn most of their crews they were without sufficient defenders, and might be easily taken and destroyed.

"The galleys must at once be brought over here," said she with decision to me, "or better still, if it be not too late, sailed into Achill Sound, and hidden away in one of its many bays. This very night, as soon as the darkness has fallen, you, Ruari, must take as many men as can be got into the boats we have here, and make for Clare Island with all speed. When you have reached the island, do with the galleys as seems best to you."

Accordingly, when the shadows of night had overspread the land and the sea, I set about to fulfil her behest. The day-breeze had died away, and the waters were calm and tranquil as we pulled out from the castle. Rowing steadily and strongly along the north shore of Clew Bay, the sound of our oars alone breaking the silence, we held on until we arrived at Clare Island, where I was overjoyed to find our ships riding at anchor in the peaceful security of the haven.

And there, partly to rest my weary men, and partly because I could see no reason for any immediate action, I resolved to lie still till dawn.

I had hardly, as it appeared to me, laid myself

down to sleep in my cabin on *The Cross of Blood*, though some hours had passed, when I was aroused by Calvagh O'Halloran, who had been left in charge of the galleys, with the tidings that the watchers he had placed on Knockmore had come down from the hill with the intelligence that they had seen, in the first light of the morning, the tops of the masts of a large ship coming up, faint and dim, on the south against the sky.

Springing from my couch, I bade Calvagh get the galleys ready to put to sea, and while this was being done I went ashore, and, climbing the slope of Knockmore with swift steps, gazed seaward at the approaching vessel.

At first I was inclined to hesitate as to what to make of her, but as I looked, and as she kept coming on into fuller view, any doubt I entertained was set at rest.

There was a bright flashing of flame, then a heavy boom from one of her ports, succeeded by three shots fired in rapid succession.

I concluded that she was still too far out at sea for her commander to have intended these for anything but signals, and therefore I continued to stand watching her, my purpose being to discover if she intended to make for Clare Island or would hold on towards the mainland.

This took some time, for, as the breeze was off the shore and against the tide, she sailed very slowly. At length it became apparent that she was to endeavour to go on to Burrishoole or Carrickahooley,

and so would have Clare Island well on her left, for, as she passed the Point of Roonah, she was swung around between us and the coast.

I could tell from her movements that her captain was far from being certain where the channel lay among the islands that stud all the eastern side of Clew Bay; and, indeed, it takes a man who knows these parts more than well to steer a ship of middling tonnage safely through the rocks and shoals into the fairway by Illamore. I felt confident that it would be many hours before he could reach his destination, and this put into my mind to attempt to carry out a project which had occurred to me, and which might prevent him from ever reaching it at all.

The project was of a somewhat desperate nature, and if it resulted in failure then in all likelihood there would be an end so far as regards *The Cross of Blood* and its company; but if success should favour our enterprise, we might compel Sir Nicholas to raise the siege before it was well begun, and so bring the war to a close for the present by his retreat.

As I was weighing the chances both for and against us, there sounded forth from the English ship-of-war a single loud report, and shortly afterwards three shots were fired—a repetition, in fact, of the former signal. This acted on me like the pricking of a spear on a charger.

What I had in view was nothing less than the wreck of the enemy's vessel.

When I had regained the deck of my galley the anchor was weighed, and we put out into the bay,

leaving *The Grey Wolf* and *The Winged Horse* in the harbour, with orders to follow us on the next tide.

Summoning Calvagh to my side, I unfolded to him the course I thought of pursuing, and as much would depend on the stoutness and endurance of our rowers, I enjoined on him to exhort them to be steadfast, and not to be thrown into a fury and a frenzy of excitement even when they heard the shots of the Englishman roaring past their ears and we seemed to be going to certain destruction.

They were not to abandon their places at the benches unless *The Cross of Blood* should be so damaged by the enemy as to appear to be in a sinking condition. Should that disaster be imminent, then, and only then, would it become a case of each man for himself.

I judged it to be needful to give these instructions because, while I could trust everyone of my men where a matter of fighting was concerned, I was not so sure that when it came to our running away—and that was the very soul of my scheme—they would do as I wished with an equal heart. For they were of the temper in which it is easier to fight and die than to flee and live.

As we drew out from Clare Island the English ship was about two miles in front of us, with her bows pointing for the south side of Illamore, between which and the rocky islets opposite it there is a clear span of water, but before she could come abreast of Illamore there was a distance of a couple of leagues of open sea.

She went along lumberingly, and the galley, bounding forward like a racer under the swift, measured swing of the oars, had the speed of her, and began to come up with her rapidly. When we were within a mile of her, and Illamore perchance a league away, I shifted my course and bore off to the north.

The galley had no doubt been seen by the Englishmen as soon as we had emerged from Clare Island; and now, when they perceived that we were heading away from them and going north, they fetched about and came round after us.

Would their captain give chase, or would he content himself with noting whither we went and following us for a time and then turning about again? I had felt certain from the beginning that he had no pilot on board, for where were there any people who knew Clew Bay but ourselves? And sure was I that no O'Malley would ever guide a hostile ship through these waters.

What I feared was that the Englishman might pursue us for two or three miles, and then, seeing how thick the islands were in that part of the bay and how narrow the channels between them, might be deterred from proceeding further in our direction, and therefore stand off again for the other side of Illamore, as had been his purpose at first.

As I was determined to draw him on at all hazards, I made a sign to Calvagh, at whose word our oarsmen ceased pulling their great sweeping strokes, and made no more than a pretence of rowing,

so as only to keep steering-way on *The Cross of Blood*, and to deceive the Englishman into imagining that he was catching her up, as indeed he was, though not as he understood the matter.

On he came, as I had hoped, the gap between us growing less, until a ball fired from his bows fell so near as to warn me that we were within range of his guns.

The English vessel was a heavily armed ship, her sides bristling with large pieces of ordnance, and it would have required not more than a few of her shots, had they struck the galley, to send her to the bottom. And as there were but two falconets on *The Cross of Blood*, her other cannon having been removed from her to the walls of the castle, we were not able to reply to the enemy's fire with any effect. But it was not my intention to use these falconets, except to lure him into that trap I was setting for him.

Therefore I shouted to Calvagh, and the galley plunged forward again under the strong, full beat of the racing oars as he ran up and down between the rowers commanding them to pull for their lives. We could hear the cheering and the laughter on board the Englishman as he watched what he took to be our frantic efforts to escape.

And, in truth, we had put on this burst of speed none too soon, for the shots now sent after us fell so little short of our stern that I was afraid we were lost. But the peril passed, and we quickly drew away.

And thus for two miles or more the pursuit of us went on, the Englishman coming up with us and discharging his pieces at us as we slacked off rowing, and then falling behind us as the oarsman drove the galley on again. I repeated this manœuvre several times, and once only had a ball struck *The Cross of Blood*, but, as fortune would have it, without inflicting any serious injury upon us.

Now that the supreme moment was almost at hand I became conscious of a singular tumult, a very fever in my veins, and that at a time when I desired above all things to be calm and self-possessed.

I was standing by the helmsman as he steered, and, as I turned to give him the direction, I could see in the pallor that showed beneath the brown of his skin, in the fixedly gleaming eyes, in the shut lips that had no colour about them, in the whole tense attitude of the man, the visible expression of my own feelings.

For there before us lay the islands; all shapes and sizes were they, some grim and bare, others green and fair to see; island upon island, one crowding upon the other, as it were, like a wide range of low hills.

Immediately in front of us a grey, craggy rock reared its head; on one side of it was a small, round islet, a shining girdle of spray half hiding it, on the other, separated from it by a narrow passage, a great rampart of black cliffs, on whose heights the eagles loved to build, towered aloft

into the sky, the waves rolling themselves in empty thunders at its feet.

Beyond this passage was seen a spacious land-locked bay as it appeared to be, so closed in did it seem on all sides by islands. And through this passage did I give command to go.

There was a mute protest in the look the helmsman gave me, for this passage is none other than that called the Gate of Fears, and no mariner ever makes use of it save from direst necessity and with many crossings of himself and murmured vows. But the galley made a half-turn obedient to the helmsman's hand, and so was headed for the dreaded Gate.

The Englishman was at our heels, bent upon our capture or destruction, but when he saw us approach this passage he hesitated, and was like to draw back. Whereupon I ordered Calvagh to bid the oarsmen stop rowing, and bringing the falconets into position trained them on the enemy, myself putting the blazing torch to the touch-hole.

At the same time our sailors sent up a loud taunting, derisive cry, which was answered back full-throated by the English ship. Provoked beyond endurance at us, and thinking, it might be, that where a large galley like *The Cross of Blood* might go she might venture also, she again came on at us, firing as she came.

I had to endure an agony of suspense, for there was still time for two things to happen, either of which would be fatal to my purpose.

Until the English commander had fairly entered the Gate of Fears, and so would be forced to go on, he might hold off after all. That was the first. And to tempt him on I had to keep the galley so close to the range of his ordnance that it was very probable that he might hit and sink her. That was the second.

He had, however, made up his mind that we were within his grasp, and had determined to have us. As he came slowly nearer, our oarsmen sent the galley on through the passage, and on he moved after us.

There was now a lull in his cannonading, and a strange silence fell upon us all. In that silence I waited anxiously, a prey to mingled doubts and fears, expecting to hear a slight grating, scraping sound, and to see the galley shiver and quake as she passed over the knife-edges of rocks that lie a few feet below the surface of the sea at the further end of the Gate. The tide was high, as I had reckoned, else I never would have attempted it.

Then there was a sudden tempest of smoke and flame from the Englishman, in the midst of which *The Cross of Blood* swayed and reeled as if she had been struck. I sickened with apprehension, but the swaying and the reeling quickly ceased. We were safely over the jagged barrier of rock; we had passed through the Gate, and were in the deep water beyond.

Below me I could see Calvagh's white, set face as he looked up; then, as he realised that we were

out of the dangers of the passage, a war chant broke from his fierce lips, the oarsmen rowing mightily, and keeping time to that savage, deep-chested music of his.

And on behind us came the unwitting Englishman.

In a few minutes more, looking towards her, I saw her bows tilt up and then plunge high into the air. She was lifted up and dashed down again and again on the rocks, so that her back broke, and she was torn to pieces before my eyes, while some of her sailors cast themselves into the water, with outcries and bewailings very piteous to hear, and others got into the ship's boats and put out to sea, where I know not what fate overtook them.

My men clamoured that they should be pursued, but this I would not suffer, for my end was attained, as Sir Nicholas now would have no ordnance for the battering down of the walls of Carrickahooley, and must therefore raise the siege.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SIEGE IS RAISED.

PERCHANCE it was that my spirits had been affected by the sinking of this fine ship, even though I myself had been the cause of the same—the loss of a vessel, I cannot help saying, being a thing more to be deplored than the deaths of many human beings; or it may have been that my mind, now the necessity for prompt and decisive action had passed, became, as it were, relaxed and unstrung; but, as *The Cross of Blood* threaded her way through the maze of the islands towards Carrickahooley, I could think of nothing save of how I stood in the debt of de Vilela.

In vain I strove to comfort myself by recalling the successes and the victories that had been achieved by and in the name of my mistress, Grace O'Malley, and by telling myself that she had won for herself and us an imperishable renown. Not thus could I silence the voice of my heart, which cried out that all these were but as barrenness and as nothingness so long as Eva O'Malley was not for me. For *there* was the pain, there the grief and the sadness.

Against myself did I consider myself called upon to fight. I was as deep in the Spaniard's debt as

a man could be, and yet I could not bring myself to resign all hopes of my dear, even to de Vilela, without the bitterest struggles.

Which of us twain possessed the maid's love? Was it de Vilela, or was it I? Did she love either of us?—that was the all-important question. For myself, my love had grown with my growth, was, I felt, growing still, and would keep on growing as long as I lived.

De Vilela, however, was a stranger, blown in upon us, as it were, by the chance winds of heaven. My claim was perhaps the better claim, but a maid's heart acknowledges no real claim but the claim of her love, and if her heart's love was de Vilela's, then was my claim void and empty indeed.

Therefore, let the maid decide. My thoughts had worked round to this point, when I remembered once more what Grace O'Malley had said about the Don and Eva. What if Eva loved me after all? Again, Let the maid decide, said I.

Yet, somehow, this did not altogether satisfy me. Then it occurred to me that I might pay a part of my debt to de Vilela in the following way.

He could scarcely tarry much longer with us at the castle, as he must soon depart to endeavour to carry out the objects of the secret mission with which he had been entrusted by his master, the King of Spain. The way for him would be clear and open, for I had no doubt that Sir Nicholas would not now be able to continue the siege, and that we would be left in peace and quiet till the

spring of the next year, when the war would most probably be renewed against us with larger forces, and with greater determination, both by land and sea. But all that lay in the womb of the future.

As for Don Francisco, I thought it likely that he would try to make the most of the time that remained to him before setting out for the Earl of Desmond's, that he would ask for Eva's hand from Grace O'Malley, and that thus the matter would be determined. What I set myself to do was, so long as he remained at Carrickahooley, to keep out of Eva's presence, and in a manner, as it were, to leave the field to de Vilela.

If the maid loved him, I was out of court; if she loved me, she would tell her foster-sister that she could not accept the offer of the Spaniard; if she cared for neither of us, or wavered between us, then I was resolved to forego whatever advantage I possessed over de Vilela until he had received his answer and had taken his departure.

If she accepted his suit, they would be married, I supposed drearily, before he left, and then they would set out together, and that which was unutterably and unalterably rare, dear, and precious would be gone out of my life. If Eva willed otherwise—it all rested with her. But, in any case, de Vilela was to have his chance free from any mean or unmannerly interference from me.

Little did I guess how severely the strength of my resolution was to be tested, but I thank

God, now that all is done, that it bore the strain.

It was not much past the middle of the day when *The Cross of Blood* drew up at Carrickahooley, but long before we had reached the castle we could hear the sounds of battle rolling towards us from off the land, and could see the tiny clouds of smoke made by the arquebuses as they were fired off.

Disembarking with all haste, and bringing with me most of my crew, I was instantly admitted within the water-gate. There I was told that Grace O'Malley, with de Vilela, her gentlemen, and most of her people, was making a sally on the English.

Rushing to the parapets, I could see that the centre of the fighting was between the castle and the Abbey of Burrishoole, and that it was of a very terrible and bloody character, the Englishmen displaying that dogged courage for which they are famed, while the Irish, inspired by their mistress, performed wonderful feats of valour, and were thrusting their enemies slowly back to their principal position, where, however, their further retreat was speedily checked on their being strengthened by fresh supports.

Now the purpose of Grace O'Malley in this outfall could not have extended beyond inflicting upon the Governor considerable loss, as she knew his force was far superior to her own in numbers; and I was therefore not surprised to witness the

Irish at this juncture beginning to retreat, the English attacking them fiercely in front and on their flanks.

It was at this instant that Sir Nicholas, who was himself directing the operations of his troops, conceived that he might cut our people off altogether from the castle by sending forward some soldiers he had held as a reserve, and placing them between the Irish and the castle.

I could see all this quite plainly from the walls, and, fearing lest he might succeed, I summoned my men, and, issuing from the castle gate, marched to meet this new body of the enemy, in order, if so be I was in time, to defeat the attempt, which, if well carried out, could not but be attended with the greatest possible danger, and perhaps disaster, to my mistress.

Being delayed by the roughness of the ground from coming up as quickly as I could have wished, and as they had the start of us, the English had effected their purpose, and the Irish were surrounded.

But, as we ran forward, some of the enemy faced about to meet us, and so, being taken, as it were, between two fires—Grace O'Malley with her men on the one side, and I with mine on the other—they were speedily thrown into the utmost confusion, of which we did not fail to make a good account. Still the contest was by no means entirely in our favour, for the resistance of the Governor's soldiers was protracted and bitter, each man contending for

his own hand with all the strength and cunning he was possessed of.

At length the main body of the Irish under Grace O'Malley fought their way through the enemy and joined themselves to us, my mistress being both surprised and rejoiced to find that we had returned, and had been able to come to her assistance. Beside her, their swords gleaming redly in their hands, were Brian Ogue, and Art, and Henry O'Malley, and the other gentlemen of her household; and leaning upon the arm of one of them, and supported and protected by two men, I beheld de Vilela, desperately wounded!

His face was pale, drawn, deep-lined, and spotted with blood, the eyes being closed, and the lips shut tight; the figure within his armour was bent with weariness, and weakness, and wounds; the fingers of the right hand still grasped the handle of his sword, but they shook and trembled as with palsy. Truly, he looked like one whose doom is sealed, and my heart went out to him with a great compassion.

Calling to four of my men, who were armed with spears, I caused them to make a rough litter with their weapons, and upon this rude but soldierly contrivance we laid the Spaniard, and so bore him to the castle, while behind us the fight still continued, but with less and less fierceness.

Not a sound came from Don Francisco, although the jolting must have given him the most intense pain, save once when my mistress took his hand and spoke to him, when he made reply in Spanish

that "all was well" with him. And I thought the words were not unworthy, but well became the brave soul of the man.

"I will go in with him," said Grace O'Malley to me, when we had arrived at the gate; "Ruari, do you gather our people together, and lead them within the walls."

And I did her bidding, so that in a short time I had them collected in a compact body, and under cover of the ordnance, belching forth from the battlements, retreated within the gate, bearing most of our wounded with us. There I found Grace O'Malley waiting to hear the news I had brought.

"De Vilela?" I first inquired.

"He is still alive," said she, "but I fear the hour of his passing is already upon him."

"'Fore God," cried I, with a sob in my throat, "I trust not."

"Eva tends him," said she—and in a flash I remembered everything.

"He is in good keeping," said I.

"He is in the hands of God," said she, in a voice and manner so touched with unwonted solemnity and deep feeling that I gazed at her in amazement.

Then a wild thought came to me: could she, did she, our princess, care for this man? But no sooner had the thought arisen in my mind than I dismissed it. "What have I to do with love?" she had said on a former occasion, and she had meant it.

Her next words, however, appeared to give point

to my suspicion, but when I considered them more carefully, I saw I was wrong. For what she had said was, "There are few men like Don Francisco," but the tone in which they were spoken was not that, it seemed to me, of a woman who loves; rather was it that of one who deplores the expected loss of a dear friend. Yet sometimes, in the silent watches of the night, have I wondered—and I wonder still.

"We have heard the roar of great guns from time to time this morning," said she, changing the subject abruptly, "and, knowing that you had no ordnance to speak of, I feared for your safety. Tell me what has happened."

Whereupon I related all that had taken place, and how that the English war-vessel had been dashed to pieces on the rocks at the hither end of the Gate of Fears.

Much I spoke in praise of Calvagh and the rowers of *The Cross of Blood*, and said that it was fitting they should be given a rich reward, for, notwithstanding the terrors inspired in all seafaring men by the place, and in spite of the ordnance of the Englishman making the passage like the mouth of hell, they had stood fast every one.

"And what of yourself?" cried she, between smiles and tears. "What of yourself, my Ruari?"

And she took from the mantle upon her shoulder a brooch of gold, with mystic signs, of which I knew not the meaning, engraved upon it, and in the midst of it a sapphire, with the deep blue in it of the

unfathomed abysses of the sea. This she handed to me, one of her arms about my neck, and I was uplifted with pride, albeit there was some shame mixed with it too. But the gift I compelled myself to decline.

"I may not take it," cried I; for the brooch was one of the tokens of her chieftainship to her people, and firmly resolved was I that there, in the land of her fathers, no man should ever have the slightest cause to think there was any other chief save her, and her alone. But if I took the brooch—"No," said I; "I may not take it."

Then, seeing I was determined, she sighed, said no more, but kissed me on the cheek—a thing she had not done since I was a little child, playing with her, a child too, on the sands of the shores of Clew Bay.

Thereafter together we went into the chamber of the main tower where de Vilela had been laid. There by his couch was my dear, a presence soft, tender, and full of sweet womanly pity and of the delicate ministries that spring from it. There upon the couch lay the wreck of a man; so calm, so pale, so worn, that he looked like one dead.

"He still breathes," said Eva, in a whisper.

Perhaps it was the result of the conversation I had just had with Grace O'Malley, or it may have been the subtle influence of that scene, with that quiet figure stretched upon the couch for its centre, but there was no bitterness in my breast when I saw Eva there. Who, indeed, could have felt

any other emotion at such a time but that of sorrow?

For two days de Vilela hung between life and death. More than once did it seem that his spirit had left his shattered body, and yet it did not. On the third day the Spaniard rallied; Teige O'Toole, our physician, declared that there was hope; and from that instant Don Francisco began slowly to recover.

All within the castle rejoiced, and I as much as any; but when I saw how constantly Eva was with him, and how the sick man was restless and uneasy in her brief absences from his side, and how she watched over and soothed and tended him, her mere presence being a better restorative than all the healing simples of Teige O'Toole, is it to be marvelled at that I found the determination I had come to of leaving the field open to him, and of withdrawing from it, become more and more difficult to maintain?

Neither did Sir Nicholas nor his army help greatly to distract my thoughts. For there, outside our walls, at a safe distance from our cannon, did the Governor lie day after day for a long week, waiting, doubtless, for the warship that never came.

We did not, on our side, stir out of the castle, for whatever advantage, if any, had been reaped from the sally had been purchased at too heavy a price. Grace O'Malley rightly had come to the conclusion that we had everything to gain by sitting still, and that Sir Nicholas, seeing that he could do nothing

against us without ordnance, would soon grow tired of this futile business, and so go back to Galway.

Whether he had heard in some way that the vessel he had expected had been wrecked, or feared that events had happened which had prevented it from being sent at all by Winter, the English Admiral, I know not ; but one night he stole away from Burrishoole, and when the morning was come, lo, there was not an Englishman anywhere to be seen.

It was an unfortunate coincidence in one respect that the very morning which saw the siege raised should also have witnessed the arrival of Richard Burke, attended by fifty horsemen and more than a hundred gallowlasses, for if we could have counted on such a number of fighting men in addition to our own, we should certainly have again attacked the Governor's forces and not stood so much upon our defence.

But in another respect it fell out luckily enough for us, and this was that we might now pursue him with some hope of overtaking him, and of stopping him from plundering the country, owing to the assistance of the Burkes. There was nothing more certain than that Sir Nicholas, as he retreated towards Galway, would drive before him all the cattle and horses of the land, and thus he would, after all, unless prevented, gather an enormous spoil, depriving us, and those who looked to us for protection, of a great part of our wealth. And already he had done us a vast amount of injury and harm.

So soon, therefore, as Richard Burke, who was sorely disappointed that he had not reached Carrick-ahooley sooner, had come into the castle, and had been received and entertained by my mistress, from whom he heard a narrative of what had recently occurred, Grace O'Malley proposed that he and I should set out with a large force to endeavour to recover from the English the plunder they were taking away. And to this the MacWilliam gladly assented, observing that no proposal could please him better than to take part in getting back her property for her.

"And," continued he, "as it is impossible for Sir Nicholas to move quickly, hampered as he must be with many herds of cattle and bands of horses, we can catch him up before he has gone very far."

"You will also have many opportunities," said Grace O'Malley, "of which I am sure you will not fail to make the most, of coming upon detached bodies of his troops as they struggle through the thick forests and the passes of the mountains, and of cutting them off. You can harass and harry him nearly every step of his retreat, so that when he at length reaches Galway it will be with greatly lessened forces, and with so slender a spoil that he will not care to boast of it."

"You would not offer him battle?" asked I.

"You must be the judges of that for yourselves," said she; "but Sir Nicholas is a fine soldier, and as wary as a fox in warfare, and I think you can do him

far more deadly hurt by acting as I have said. You will risk but little, and may gain much."

Then Grace O'Malley and Richard Burke began talking of what prospect there was of a general rising of the Irish against the Queen, and of the help that might be looked for from Philip of Spain, and of other matters, some of which, I suspect, lay even nearer the heart of one of them, at least.

But of this I cannot tell, for when they commenced to speak of affairs of State I went out from the hall in which they were, to get my men in readiness to pursue the English. And welcome to me was it that our expedition, and its hard service, held out the promise of drawing off my thoughts from Eva and de Vilela.

I was eager that we should make a start at once, but the Burkes were weary and footsore with their long, toilsome journey. For that day, then, they rested, Grace O'Malley giving them and all in the castle a great feast, filling them with food and wine, while her harpers stirred their souls with songs of the mighty deeds done by the mighty dead.

Songs, too, they made to music now sweet, now fierce, in honour of my mistress, acclaiming her as not the least in the long list of a line of heroes! Whereupon the castle rang with tumultuous shoutings of applause. Then the minstrels cunningly turned their themes to the Burkes of Mayo, English once, but Irish now—ay, even more Irish than the Irish themselves.

And so the day passed.

In the morning we left Carrickahooley with a hundred horsemen and a hundred running footmen, besides horse-boys and others. Behind us came many of the fugitives who had come to us fleeing from before the English, and who now were returning to their homes, or to what poor, charred remains of them might be found.

As we moved swiftly on, we saw many evidences of the havoc wrought by the ruthless invaders; here the hut of the wood-kerne, who lives by hunting, there the hovel of the churl, who tills the fields, burnt to the ground; while over all brooded the silence of desolation and death.

It was not till evening was upon us that we knew by many indications that we were close on the enemy. Then we halted and waited till the night had fully come, sending out in the meantime our spies to see what the English were doing.

Softly, like thieves, they returned with word they had discovered that Sir Nicholas and the greater portion of his army were not to be seen, having apparently gone on, but that a small company of English soldiers and most of the O'Flahertys of Aughnasure were camped some two or three miles away, having in their charge great droves of cattle. Having no thought that they were being followed up by us, they had made no preparations for defence, and therefore might easily fall into our hands.

Leaving our chargers to the care of the horse-boys, we divided ourselves into two bands, Richard

Burke being in command of the one, and I of the other; and, going very circumspectly so as to give no hint of our approach, we burst upon the enemy, many of whom were slain at the first onset, but a far larger number escaped us in the darkness. We spent the rest of the night in their camp, having secured the cattle; and when daylight made manifest everything to us I saw that we had accomplished all this victory without the loss of a single man, there being but few wounds even among us.

Then we rode on that day and two more, now and again falling in with scattered companies of the enemy, whom we slew or dispersed, and recovering from them whatever plunder they were taking out of the land. But Sir Nicholas we did not meet with, as he had gone on day and night without halting, having heard, as I afterwards learned, that the Burkes of Clanrickarde, under Ulick, the son of the earl, had brought together several hundred men, including many Scots, and that they were even now threatening Galway itself.

As we were not purposed to go on to Galway after the Governor, we returned to Carrickahooley at our leisure.

And now, as we journeyed northwards, Richard Burke's talk to me was all of his love for my mistress. How brave, how strong, how great she was! And of how wonderful a spirit and so wise withal! Did I think that she had a regard for anyone in especial? Or, that he might have a chance with her?

And thus he talked and talked, until I, who had my own love trouble, and found it hard enough, was first constrained to listen, then to utter words of sympathy, and, last of all, was unfeignedly glad when our arrival at the castle put a stop to the out-flowing of his eloquence.

CHAPTER XVI.

"OUR NATURAL LEADER."

"THE Earl of Desmond," said Grace O'Malley to me, "is our natural leader against the English, and I wish you to go and see him."

These words my mistress addressed to me shortly after Richard Burke and I had returned. She and I were alone, and, indeed, she had sent for me expressly, so that I knew it was of some matter of importance she wished to speak to me. I had not anticipated, however, that it would be this.

"Yes," I said. "When do you desire me to go? De Vilela will hardly be able to be moved for some time yet, and I suppose that he will accompany me."

Don Francisco was better, but several weeks would have to elapse before he would stand on his feet, or even be moved from his bed with safety.

"No," said she. "I do not think it prudent to wait so long a period as may have to pass before de Vilela has sufficiently recovered. You must take Fitzgerald with you, and set out at once for the Desmond stronghold at Askeaton. Fitzgerald is now nearly well, his wound being all but healed. He possesses something of the confidence of the King of

Spain, which Don Francisco enjoys to the full, and is therefore in a position to speak with Desmond, and to find out what his intentions are."

"As you will," said I, not without gladness, for it would be a way, and that a perfect one, to enable me to keep my resolution with regard to Eva and de Vilela—if I were out of the castle altogether, then indeed would the field be left to him alone. But, at the same time, there was a gripping about my heart that certainly was not caused by pleasure.

"It would be most unwise to delay," continued she. "Sir Nicholas Malby will come against us so soon as he can raise a large army; if not Sir Nicholas, then another; if not this year, and he will scarcely do so now the winter approaches, then next year. And thus will the contest go on till the end has come. Under Desmond, the head of the Geraldines, the greatest noble of the South, all the Irish people will rally."

My mistress's voice was full of excitement; but I was not so sure of Desmond, and so made haste to remind her that he had been out against the Queen before, and had got nothing but imprisonment and grievous loss for his pains.

"It is not the same now," replied she, with her ardour undiminished; "for Philip of Spain will throw his sword into the balance. When Desmond understands that he will be backed up by the ships and the soldiers and the money of Spain, he will throw off all irresolution, and show himself to be the great prince he is. Tell him that we are with him heart

and soul. Tell him that the Burkes, both the Upper and the Lower Burkes, will forget their feuds, and unite for this one common purpose. Tell him there will be no lack of treasure; and as an earnest of this we will now go to the Caves of Silence, and take from thence the chest of gold found on the *Capitana*—I have spoken to de Vilela about it—and some gems as well, as a present from me.”

My mistress’s mind was made up, and vain would it have been for me to try to cause her to change her determination. And why should I try? Was not what she said true? Was not Desmond a prince in the land? If he could not be depended upon to lead us against the English, then on whom could we depend? So I stifled whatever of doubt I felt. Grace O’Malley was my leader, and if she were content with Garrett Desmond, then so was I.

We went together to the Caves of Silence, and brought away from them the chest of gold, a casket richly chased and adorned with rare jewels, and a dagger, the handle and sheath of which were studded with precious stones.

“What hatred of the English may not accomplish,” said my mistress, “gold will. Many a good sword may be bought when neither love nor hate would affect aught; many a waverer made steadfast on the rock of gold.”

I was to sail early next morning in *The Cross of Blood*, and in the evening when I sat in the hall, she straightly charged me that I was on no account to adventure the ship or myself in any sort of peril, and

that I was not to attack any vessel, however fair and goodly a prize it might seem; nay, on the contrary, I must keep out of the track of ships as far as was practicable.

When the two ladies left us for the night, and I rose to bid them farewell for a time, I held Grace O'Malley's hand, and she pressed mine warmly. I would have given all that I had in the world, or ever hoped to possess of it, if Eva would but have clasped my hand with something of the same fervour, or that I could have held hers and caressed it with a lover's fondness.

And the eyes of my dear, too, were soft and kind, so that my heart cried out for a token, but my debt to de Vilela stood between us, and I only touched the little hand.

She looked at me somewhat strangely, I fancied, as if the coldness of my manner made her marvel, and I think that there perhaps was a faint gleam of laughing malice in the face of Grace O'Malley, who stood by. But in the morning, there, at the window high up the tower, were to be seen both my mistresses, with their fingers to their lips kissing me good-bye, as the galley was pulled out from the harbour.

It was now October, a month of storms, and we had to encounter head winds, heavy seas, and much stress of weather, so that our progress southward was slow. Keeping close in shore, we took advantage of whatever protection the coast, or the islands along it, afforded us, having frequently to put in

and stop in one or another of the bays of Con-naught.

A full week was thus taken up before we had gotten through the South Sound between Inisheer and the mainland, and, with the exception of some fishing boats, we had had the sea to ourselves.

As we passed down the rocky, mountain-crowned coast, we were sorely buffeted and wrought upon by the winds and waves. By the time we were abreast of the Cliffs of Moher, so furious a tempest was raging that I feared never would we live through it.

The stoutness of the galley, however, and perhaps some skill of seamanship, brought us safely to the Head of Cregga, which we essayed to round, but experienced so great a travail in the doing of it, albeit we did it, that we were well-nigh exhausted with the labour. But, once round the Head, we found ourselves in a stretch of water which, by comparison with that we had gone over, was as a quiet pool, to wit, the Bay of Liscanor.

And here we remained for some hours, looking for such an abatement of the storm as would allow us to proceed; but in this our hope was not to be realised as soon as we had expected, for the night fell, and the fury of the tempest was not spent.

The first object that met our gaze when the light of morning had come was a ship, all her masts gone, and the waves sweeping over her, go driving to her doom on the rocks of Cregga. As now her bows, now her stern was lifted up, so that we got a full view of her hull, there was that about her that seemed to

me not unfamiliar, but I could not say then what it was. Clutching the ropes and bolts on and about what remained of her bulwarks were a few men, clinging desperately in the face of death to their last hold on life.

There was no possibility of the ship being saved, and there was hardly a greater likelihood of saving the lives of any of these miserable sailors, but I resolved to make the attempt, at least.

Bringing up *The Cross of Blood* as near as I dared to the Head, and having made ready to lower her two small boats, I waited for the moment when the vessel would crash upon the rocks, and be crushed and broken upon them. As she neared the cliffs, the spume of the waves shooting high and white in the air, the foaming, roaring waters, dashed back by the rocks, caught and twisted her about, so that, as her side was turned to us, I saw her name in letters of white and gold.

She was *The Rosemary*, a shot from which had caused the death of my master, Owen O'Malley, a few months before, and well did I remember how I saw her sail up the Shannon on her way to Limerick, with the two eerie figures shadowed against her canvas.

For an instant I felt an impulse to stand off, and to make no effort to avert the fate of any of her men—it was uncertain, I told myself, whether at the best I could render them any assistance. But, after all, we had no quarrel with these wretched mariners, about to be swallowed up by the ever-hungry sea,

and, if we had had, this extremity of theirs was of a kind which we could not look upon as our opportunity and have been worthy of the name of men.

Therefore, when *The Rosemary* rose to the waves for the last time, and was borne aloft on the black edge of a huge roller, and then shattered to fragments upon the rocks, did we keep a sharp look-out for the bodies, living or dead, if any, which might appear on the water near where we were.

And five poor souls, by means of our boats, did we save alive, or, being as the dead, did bring to life again—and one of them was a woman.

Surely this was the queerest trick that fate ever played upon me, for the woman was none other than Sabina Lynch! Nor do I wonder that, when she had come to herself and, seeing me, knew upon whose ship she was, she did imagine she had but escaped from one kind of calamity to meet with another, and that perhaps worse: for she had to be restrained, and that by force, from casting herself back into the sea, preferring death to being in my hands.

And, verily, I was in a grievous quandary with regard to her.

She would not eat nor drink nor rest nor sleep, but only cried and sobbed and moaned, till she fell into a sort of stupor. Recovering after awhile, she did naught but cry and sob and moan again, and was so distraught that I felt a pity for her. Then, what was I to do with her? True, I could keep her a captive, and take her back with me when I returned to Carrickahooley, and give her

over to my mistress, who would doubtless accord her the grimmest of welcomes. And this, perhaps, was my duty. If it were, I failed in it.

Urged on by a woman's spite and jealousy, Sabina Lynch had played a treacherous and cruel part in regard to Grace O'Malley, and she was, in a measure, the cause of our quarrel with Sir Nicholas and the English. Sure was I that my mistress would not be merciful to her, nor would she expect me to be. Why, then, should I have been?

I have no other answer, if it be an answer, except that I was deep in love with Eva O'Malley, and that my love for her made me feel certain that Eva, much as Grace was to her—as to me—would have told me to act as I did towards this woman. For I determined to let her go free.

It is not in me to explain this matter further, nor to tell how often I argued it with myself, ever coming back, however, to what I conceived would be the desire of Eva—to let Sabina Lynch go. And if the other course was my duty, there was meted out to me, as will be seen, punishment out of all proportion to my fault.

Having come to the conclusion that Sabina Lynch should be set at liberty when a suitable opportunity presented itself, I acquainted her with my decision. She could scarcely believe her ears, and was not convinced that I meant what I said until I informed her that she might move about the galley as she pleased, and that I would put her ashore at Liscanor

if she wished it, or take her on with us if that was her will.

When she saw that I did not intend to deceive her, nor to do her any hurt, she told me that she was going to Limerick. Inquiring why she had left Galway, I now heard of the rising of the Upper Burkes under Ulick, the son of the Earl of Clanrickarde, which had caused Sir Nicholas to hurry back to that city—as I have before recorded. It appeared that the people of Galway were in the extreme of terror, as nearly all the fighting men of the place had been withdrawn from it, and from Athlone, where was the next English garrison, as well, for the expedition against Grace O'Malley, and the city was thus left without defenders.

The Burkes had met with no resistance on their march to Galway, and the city was in great danger of being taken and sacked. A way out, however, remained, by the sea; and so grave was the state of affairs that Stephen Lynch, the mayor, had gladly availed himself of an opportunity of sending his daughter away for safety by *The Rosemary*, which happened to be leaving for Limerick. Along with her had also gone several ladies of Galway, but they had all perished in the wreck.

I now informed Sabina Lynch that I was bound for the Shannon, and that I would put her ashore at some point on the river near Limerick, if our voyage had a favourable termination, but that I thought it would be better for her to land here at Liscanor.

However, she replied that she had friends at Limerick, but knew no one in Liscanor, and so begged to be allowed to remain on *The Cross of Blood*. She prevailed upon me with her entreaties, and I consented—wherein, God wot, I was weak enough, though nothing short of her death could have prevented what was to occur.

There is a saying among us Celts, "What will be, already *is*," and this saying is true.

The day which succeeded that on which *The Rosemary* was destroyed saw us out of the Bay of Liscanor, and, the weather being propitious, the next found us entering the mouth of that most beautiful of all the beautiful rivers of Ireland, the Shannon. But it was not until two days later that I brought the galley into the bay of the creek upon which, some miles inland, stands Askeaton, the fortress of the Desmonds.

During this time, being fully occupied with the working of the ship, I had seen little or nothing of Mistress Lynch, who, however, had had many conversations with Fitzgerald, and often did I hear them laughing and jesting, the one with the other, as if there were no such things in the world as bad weather and storms, and shipwrecks and war, and the deaths of men.

Now the bay in which the galley lay was no great distance from Limerick, and as it would have been the height of madness to go any nearer that city, which could not but be very hostile to us, I told Sabina Lynch that our journey was at an end, and

that she was free to go. Whereupon she thanked me, and along with Fitzgerald, who had offered himself as her escort for part of the way, and who was well acquainted with the country—for it was all the territory of the Geraldines—left *The Cross of Blood*.

On his return, he and I, accompanied by some of our men, and taking with us the presents sent by my mistress, set out for Askeaton, where we were received by the Earl of Desmond.

The castle was one of the largest and most formidable in Ireland, consisting of several towers and strongly built houses and stables, the whole surrounded by high walls around which flowed the waters of the creek, so that it looked like a town on an island in the middle of a lake. A village, with a church at one end of it, stood on the rising ground that led up from one of the banks of the stream over against the castle.

When the drawbridge was lowered—Fitzgerald making the matter of an entrance easy for us—and we had passed within the walls, I saw in the yard a considerable number of the gallowglasses of the Geraldines, some having arquebuses, but most of them only spears or battle-axes and swords.

One of the knights of the Earl's household approached us, and said that his lord was ready to see us. Fitzgerald and he—they were cousins, it appeared—began at once to talk, and they introduced me to several other gentlemen whom we met. And so we went into the presence of the Earl.

Grace O'Malley had said that he was "our natural leader" against the English, and narrowly did I scan the features of Garrett Desmond as he rose from his chair to offer me his hand.

My first impression was that of extraordinary disappointment, for I could see nothing very notable about him. Then, as he spoke, I noticed a twitching of the lips that strongly savoured of indecision, to say the least, and also that his eyes roamed restlessly, not settling fixedly on man or thing for a single instant. And as I observed him the closer, the keener was my disappointment.

Yet this noble was a great power in the land. Once the Desmond war-cry was sounded forth from Askeaton, thousands would shake their spears in ready response. He had but to say the word and the whole South-West of Ireland would spring to arms. He had said it once and might say it again, but I distrusted and disliked him from the first.

Courteously, however, did he receive me, and graciously the gifts which I presented to him in the name of my mistress. He inquired of me many things respecting her, to all of which I replied to the best of my ability. Indeed, during the time I spent at Askeaton, he never appeared weary of hearing about her and her exploits, which seemed, he said, incredible in one so young.

Then, after we had feasted together, he called Fitzgerald and myself aside and took us into an inner room where we three were by ourselves. And

now Fitzgerald told him of the help, both in men and money, which Philip of Spain promised in the event of a general rising against the Queen, and I repeated to him all the words which Grace O'Malley had charged me to say to him.

Never once did I take my glance off him, but he would not meet my eyes. For the most part he paced up and down the room, and one could easily see the travail of his mind in the working of his face. At one moment there would be gladness and the look of resolve, then doubt and gloom would take their place the next. The same uncertainty could be seen even in his walk, which was now swift, now slow.

At last he said that it was a heavy matter, and not lightly to be undertaken, and invited me to stay at the castle until he had considered it more at large. I pressed for an immediate reply to my mistress, but he asked me to tarry for a few days, and, as I could not well do otherwise, there did I remain until one morning he gave me a letter for Grace O'Malley and many presents for her and myself, and so dismissed me.

During the time I waited for his answer I heard from several that a Spanish army was looked for in the spring, and I could see that the Earl knew all that was going on. Therefore I did not doubt but that he had sent a message to my mistress that would please her well.

And while I was thus waiting, the hours hanging heavily on my hands, I made myself well acquainted

with the castle—its towers and strong rooms and walls—and thus acquired a knowledge which was to stand me in good stead before the end was come.

Then it was Ho! for *The Cross of Blood*, and Ho! for Carrickahooley, which we reached after a voyage unmarked by any incident worthy of record.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DEAR VICTORY.

CHIEFLY by reason of the tempestuous weather, my journey to Askeaton and back again had occupied not far short of a month,—which was a much longer time than had been reckoned upon. On my arrival at Carrickahooley my mistress was naturally very impatient to hear what was the response of the Earl of Desmond to her message, and also what my opinion of that noble was.

First of all I delivered to her the letter and the presents he had sent. When she had read his letter she handed it to me, and there was, I could see, a great light of happiness on her face. But when I had glanced over the missive, I was not so satisfied with its contents as she plainly was.

The letter was not a long one, and, in brief, was nothing more or less than an invitation from Desmond, asking my mistress to go on a visit to him at Askeaton, where his countess would give her a warm welcome, so soon as spring was come, or as early as would be convenient for her.

With regard to any rising against the Queen he said not a word, but intimated that he was very desirous of meeting one of whom he had heard so

much, and of discussing with her such matters as affected their mutual interests.

This last phrase Grace O'Malley took as a hint that the Earl, not caring to commit himself to anything definite on paper, was of the same mind as herself, for they had no interests in common save such as lay in the expulsion of the English from the island.

Now the message my mistress had sent him was frank and open, so that there could not be two opinions as to its import. But these words of his, it seemed to me, partook in no degree of the same character. They might mean much or little or even nothing at all, so vague were they.

If I had not seen the Earl my view might have been different, but in the cloudiness of his letter I again saw his weakness and want of purpose. I did not, I could not, suspect him of anything worse. However, Grace O'Malley, although I expressed to her what I felt about Desmond, was assured that he could only mean one thing, and that was that he shared in her ideas, and would be ready to give such effect to them as he could.

"Yes," said she, "Garrett Desmond is the man."

And she was the more certain of this when I went on to tell her that I had heard a great deal at Askeaton, and that with hardly a pretence of secrecy, of the army which the King of Spain was to send in aid of the Irish the following year.

"Do you not see," said she, "that Desmond must be heart and soul in the business, or else he

would have suffered none of this talk of Philip of Spain?"

I had, indeed, made a similar reflection when at Desmond's castle, but what I distrusted was the character and strength of the man himself. But my mistress was my mistress, so I said no more then of the Earl.

I had had no small disputings with myself as to whether I should tell Grace O'Malley about what had occurred with respect to Sabina Lynch or not. I could not blame myself, albeit these very searchings of my spirit did show some doubt if I had done what was best, and tell her I did.

Whereupon for a minute she fell into a fit of silent rage, which, however, presently passed away—the only thing she said being the question, sharply asked—

"Would you have acted in that way, Ruari, *if it had been a man?*"

And the sting of the taunt, for such I felt it to be, lay perhaps in its truth. Howbeit, neither of us ever referred, in speaking to each other, to the matter again.

Richard Burke and his followers had left the castle, and had gone back to their own territory. He had made me the confidant of his hopes and fears with regard to his love for Grace O'Malley, and I desired greatly to know how he had sped in his wooing.

It was not, however, till long afterwards that I discovered he had pressed his suit, and that not alto-

gether without success, but that she would give him no definite promise so long as her affairs were in so unstable a condition.

I did not know of any man in all the world whom I esteemed a fit mate for her, but the MacWilliam had many things in his favour, not the least being that he was a valiant soldier. That he had ranged himself on her side in her quarrel with the Governor also had its weight with her. I think, however, that at this time he had a very small share in her thoughts, as she was entirely wrapped up in the Earl of Desmond, whom she looked upon as the Hope of Ireland, and in the furtherance of her plans.

De Vilela was still at Carrickahooley, and had so far got healed of his wounds that he was able to be about for an hour or two each day. He greeted me with his never-failing courtesy, and after I had seen more of him I noticed that the air of melancholy gravity he had borne during the siege had in nowise changed, unless it were by being even deeper than before.

The sufferings he had undergone and the feebleness he still endured might easily have accounted for this. But I was persuaded that there was another reason, although it took me some time to arrive at this conclusion.

What put me in the way of it was that I caught him, when he believed himself free from observation, looking at me, not once, nor twice, but often, with a wistful intentness, as if he were trying to read my very

thoughts, and so to pierce to the innermost soul of me. Why was this? Why was he thus weighing me as it were in the balance?

Eva was not so much with him now that he was regaining his strength, and, whether he was with her or not, he had not the look of a happy lover, that look which, methinks, would be present notwithstanding pain and the shadow of death.

And I put the two things together, though not hastily, for I feared nothing so much as to be wrong in this, and guessed that he had lost all hope of her for himself, and was asking himself whether, if so be she loved me, I was in any way worthy of her. But I think the chief care of this very noble gentleman of Spain was not pity for himself, nor my worthiness or unworthiness—which is the truer word, but that this woman whom he loved should have her heart's desire, on whomsoever that desire might fall, and at whatsoever cost to himself.

I did not perceive this in one day, or for many, and, pursuing the course I had before determined on, abode firm in my resolve not to appear even to come between him and Eva O'Malley.

The winter wore on to the day of the Birth of Christ, and all was quiet and peaceful in Connaught.

Hardly, however, did the new year open—it was that year of grace, 1579—when messengers from various chiefs in the north-west of Ireland began coming to and going away from Carrickahooley.

Sometimes their business was with my mistress, but still more frequently was it with de Vilela, for

it had gone abroad that he was with us, and that he was in the confidence of the King of Spain, from whom he had a mission to the Irish. Among these were some of the MacSweenys of Tir-Connall, who spoke for themselves and also for their prince, O'Donnell, whose wife was a Macdonald, and a kinswoman of my own. Many were the plots on foot, my mistress striving to bring about a great confederacy of the north.

Sir Nicholas Malby, after he had repulsed the Burkes of Clanrickarde and driven them back to their mountains, lay at Galway darkly meditating schemes of vengeance. But, for the present, with the land all about him in a ferment, he did nothing but bide his time.

Indeed, by the coming of spring, the whole island was stirring with the fever of war, some looking to Spain, and some to Desmond, so that the commanders of the English, from the Lord Deputy at Dublin to the poorest of his captains, were in sore trouble and disquiet.

So passed the winter away.

"Darkness and blood; then a little light," had been the saying of Teige O'Toole, the Wise Man. Now was the time of the little light of which he had spoken; it was immediately to be followed by the period of which he had said, "blood and darkness, then again light, but darkness were better."

It was in April, then, of this year of fate that de Vilela, having perfectly recovered of his wounds,

Grace O'Malley bade me get *The Cross of Blood* in readiness to convey him to Askeaton.

De Vilela was anxious to be gone, having trespassed upon our hospitality, as he said, beyond all measure. And he was the more eager as now he knew for certain that Eva had nothing stronger than a friendship for him. He had not asked her, I imagine, so sure was he that she did not love him, and it was like the man, that, knowing this, he would not vex her even with words.

At the last moment, and unexpectedly, my mistress determined to sail with us, and Eva O'Malley also came, Tibbot being left in charge at Clare Island and Carrickahooley.

With fair winds, and hopes as fair, did we leave Clare Bay behind us, and for two days all went well. On the third day of the voyage, the wind having changed, the watch descried a ship coming up against the line of the sky, and when we had observed her for a short time we saw that she was making towards us. Being much higher out of the water than the galley, she had no doubt seen us first.

We edged in closer to the land, which loomed up some miles away on our left; whereupon she shifted her course as if to cut us off. As she came within nearer view she appeared to be a great ship, carrying many pieces of cannon, and flying the English flag. The morning sun fell upon her, and disclosed her deck covered with men whose armour and weapons sparkled in the light.

It was abundantly evident that she was a ship-of-war of the English, and well prepared in every respect to attack and overwhelm us. Both as regarded her ordnance and the numbers of her crew, that she was vastly superior to us was plain. Should she get the range of us I made no doubt that we should be quickly knocked to pieces.

On the high seas, a galley like *The Cross of Blood* could not be opposed to such a ship except with the one result, and that the worst. Our case was little short of desperate, but I did not lose heart.

Nor did my mistress give up hope. She and I held a hurried consultation with Calvagh O'Halloran, and determined that we should first try to escape by rowing. There was the land before us, and a rocky cape jutting from it held out, as it were, a friendly beckoning hand.

Once we had made it, and were safely round it, we would be in a shallow bay, into which flowed a river—up which the galley might go, but not so large a ship as the Englishman. We therefore bent our whole energies to this end, but all in vain. It became apparent before we were half-way to the shore that we were completely outsailed, and were at the mercy of the enemy.

When I had fully grasped the extreme peril in which we were, and reflected that my whole world was on board this galley, to say nothing of the fact that every timber of it was dear to me, my heart well-nigh fainted within me. Here was that great

woman whom I served; here also the woman whom I loved.

Was it to this destiny they had been born? Notwithstanding our danger, I could not believe it.

What was the worst that the spite of fortune could wreak upon us?

Either *The Cross of Blood* would be sunk by the enemy's fire, and we would perish in the sea, or she would be captured, many of us being killed in the struggle, and the rest taken—what would be their fate?

But there was no need to ask that; for I was well assured that the people of the English ship knew who we were, or, at least, whose galley it was, for who in Ireland had such a vessel as *The Cross of Blood*, except Grace O'Malley?

Such were my thoughts when my mistress spoke in my ear, and said that as it was impossible to escape from the Englishman we must fight him.

"With all my heart," cried I; "but how?"

Then she told me what to do.

I went forward to Calvagh, and bade him order his oarsmen to row with all their might until I gave a signal; when it was given they were to get their arms ready, but without making a noise or leaving their benches, and having their oars resting on the water.

The Cross of Blood raced on, but the English ship went faster, until a shotted gun fired across our bows made us well aware of what we had

known sufficiently already—that we must be sunk, or give ourselves up, or, at least, appear to do so.

Calvagh looked at me, but I gave no sign. Grace O'Malley changed the galley's course, so that we gained a little by it; and on we plunged again, making for the open sea. But the advantage we had thus obtained was of no real value to us, and the Englishman, with his square bulging sails swelling in the breeze, was quickly at our heels.

And now a second and, as it were, more peremptory message of iron bade us throw up the game and lie to. The great shot fell so close to the poop of the galley, and made so heavy a splash in the water, that the spray from it might almost have fallen on our deck but for the wind. I glanced at my mistress and she nodded.

There was no purpose to be served in rowing any longer, for in another second we might be sent below the waves. Nor did we make any attempt to return the enemy's fire, and so, perhaps, invite a broadside from him which would probably have settled our affairs for ever.

Calvagh's eyes were fastened on me, and now I gave him the signal; his voice roared hoarsely through the galley; the oarsmen sat erect on their benches, and the rowing ceased.

Something that was between a sob and a groan came from the lips of our men; a sort of quiver passed over them, as each of them quietly got his sword or battle-axe from its place; and then there

was a silence, only broken by the waters as they lapped along our sides and swished under the blades of the oars.

De Vilela, who had gone into his cabin to put on his armour as soon as the chase of us began, now appeared. Approaching my mistress and me, and in accents tremulous as I had never before heard from him, he asked a question of Grace O'Malley.

"Señorita," inquired he, "tell me, you do not intend to give up the galley thus tamely to the English? Surely it were better to die."

"Better to die," said she, "yes, by the Cross!" And then she rapidly spoke a few words, which I could see were not displeasing to him. And I like to recall the man, as he stood beside me that day; clad in his suit of mail, with the crest of his house shining on his helmet, his naked sword drawn, its point resting on the deck of the poop; and his eyes bright and steadfast, while a smile was on his lips. And we looked towards the English ship, saw the scowling faces of our foes hanging over her bows, and waited on the will of the God of Battles.

Grace O'Malley in the meantime went down to her cabin to speak words of hope and comfort to Eva. When I thought of my dear, my heart again fainted within me; then it seemed to grow so big and strong, calling, as it were, loudly to me to play the man this day, that I felt there was nothing that was wholly impossible to me!

My mistress now returned to the poop-deck, and taking the helm from the steersman, as we stood close in by the enemy's vessel, she put it down sharply, so that the galley was thrown into the fore-chains of the Englishman.

"O'Malley! O'Malley! O'Malley!" I cried, and quicker than a flash, before the English had got over the suddenness of the movement, our men, with de Vilela and myself at their head, had leaped on board of her.

With thrust of sword and blow of battle-axe we made good our footing on the deck, and for a space the English fell back before us. Their captain, a towering figure in armour, save for his head, on which was a broad cap with a dancing plume of feathers in it, rallied them, and led them on at us, shouting for St. George and England.

They were more in number than ourselves, but despair nerved our arms, so that we withstood them, albeit we were hard pressed, and the fighting was terrible beyond all words. I sought to engage the captain, but de Vilela was before me.

Then there occurred an unexpected and almost unheard-of and incredible thing.

I knew the voice at once, and, turning in the direction from whence it came, and thus being partly off my guard, could not altogether ward off the dart of a sword, so that I was wounded in the throat, and, had it been but a little truer, would have been slain.

Above the clang of meeting weapons and the rattle of armour and the shouts and sobs and the

catchings for breath of the foemen, the voice of my mistress was heard crying in the tongue of the Irish :

“ Let the O'Malleys divide, and stand on each side of the ship ! ”

It was a difficult matter in itself to accomplish, and some there were of the Irish who were unable to do so ; but such of us who could obeyed her command without pausing to try to understand what she would be at.

Then there came forth a great tongue of fire, a blinding cloud of smoke, and so tremendous a report that the ship was shaken from stem to stern.

And this is what had taken place :

When we had sprung on board of the English ship, Grace O'Malley was left standing at the helm of *The Cross of Blood*. She had watched the contest, and, fearing that we were overmatched, had cast about for some means of assisting us. Then, taking with her a few of the men whom she had kept in the galley for her own guard, she had climbed up into the forecastle of the enemy, and, as their attention was entirely occupied with us, had, unperceived by them or seen too late, run in board one of the Englishman's bow-chasers, and had turned it on its owners.

The piece, thus levelled at this terrible short range, swept the deck of its defenders, and among the heaps of the slain and the wounded were several of our own people who had not been able to gain the bulwarks.

I was myself leaning against one of the ship's

beams breathing hard, and clutching with the fingers of my left hand my bleeding throat, while my right still grasped my sword. So dreadful was the sight of the deck that now met my eyes that I could not help closing them, while a shudder shook my whole frame.

But our work was not yet done. For when we essayed to carry the poop we were beaten back in spite of all our endeavours, and what might have been the end I know not if Grace O'Malley had not held possession of that piece of ordnance. A second and a third discharge from it shattered and destroyed the poop, and at length the ship was ours, its whole crew being killed or captured or drowned, for many of the English jumped into the sea and perished.

Having collected her men together, and along with them having brought away the prisoners and what treasure was found on board of *The Star of the Sea*, which was the name of the ship, she ordered it to be scuttled, and then withdrew to the galley.

But when we came to count up what this battle had cost us, our loss was so great that my mistress deemed it expedient to go no further with her journey at that time, and thus we returned again to Clew Bay, having been absent but a few days. And there was much mourning among us, for many of our people had been slain. De Vilela, however, had come unscathed from the fray, and my own wound was, after all, not much more than a scratch.

But the uncertainty of the issue of our whole conflict with the English had been brought home to me in so decided a manner that for the first time I realised how dark and menacing was the path that lay before our feet.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT ASKEATON.

I WAS never one to whom it is easy to sit still with folded hands, still less the man to muse darkly for long over the chances and mischances of war. Mine certainly was it not to consider and to see the end of a thing even from its beginning; the hour and its work were enough for me. Scarcely, then, were we come back but I burned to be again on the water with the deck of *The Cross of Blood* beneath my feet, and rejoice did I exceedingly when my mistress told me what her purpose now was, and bade me get the three galleys ready for sea.

She was resolved to put her whole fortune on the hazard, and to employ her entire strength in the struggle, and, at the same time, to get what aid she could from others.

Thus, undeterred by our encounter with the English ship-of-war—from which we had so hardly emerged—nay, rather made the more determined by it, she had sent messengers, fleet of foot and strong, to Richard Burke, the very day we had arrived at Carrickahooley, inviting him to come to her with his best and his bravest, and, if he would serve her, as he had professed himself ready, to tarry not by the way.

I was nowise in doubt as to what the answer of the MacWilliam would be. Not only was he committed as much as we ourselves to the contest against the Governor, but he had promised to support Grace O'Malley in any manner she might desire ; nor could I imagine anything that would give him a keener pleasure than to comply with her request.

Two or three weeks passed, however, before he appeared at the castle, but when he did come it was at the head of a picked company of his gallowglasses, two hundred strong.

In the battles and fights of the previous year our force had been reduced by perhaps a third, and our numbers had been still further lessened in the bloody engagement with *The Star of the Sea*. Welcome, then, were these stalwart Burkes of Mayo. True, they were unused to the sea, but it was my mistress's intention that we should all land, and hold ourselves at the disposal of the Earl of Desmond.

"If need be," said she, discussing her plans with Richard Burke and me, "I will burn the galleys behind me."

Whether I fought on the sea or on shore was a matter of indifference to me ; but I could not hear her say this without a pang, although I recognised to the full the spirit which inspired the words.

"There will be no necessity for that," said de Vilela, who was present, smiling, "for the ships of my master, the King of Spain, will sweep the sea clear of the English."

It was the month of May, and the earth was

arraying herself once again in her garments of green, when we weighed out from the harbour of Clare Island.

At first, the weather being unsettled, we made but slow progress ; however, on the night of the second day of our voyage a fair wind sprang up, and on the fourth day we were in the Shannon, going up with the tide, under a blue sky warm with the promise of summer. Casting anchor between the Island of Aughinish and the mainland for the night, I went ashore to see if I could hear any tidings of Desmond, or if anything was known of the expected ships from Spain.

The sight of the three galleys had drawn a number of the peasants to the bank of the river, and, when I had dispelled their fears of us, I found that they were willing enough to talk. Howbeit, they could tell us nothing of Desmond, nor had they any word of the Spanish ships.

When I had repeated this to my mistress on my return, she asked me to go next day to Askeaton, and to inform the Earl, if he were there at his fortress, that she was on her way to him, but if he were absent to ascertain where he was. Accordingly I proceeded in *The Cross of Blood* to the bay into which flows the stream on which the castle stands, and arrived at my destination.

As I was already well known at Askeaton I was admitted within the gate without demur, and almost the first man I met was Fitzgerald, who greeted me with much warmth. But I had not conversed with

him long before I perceived that he did not seem to be in his accustomed spirits, and when I told him that my mistress, Eva O'Malley, Richard Burke, and de Vilela were no great distance away, he appeared to be somewhat distressed.

"Is Garrett Desmond here?" I asked, and the usually frank expression of his face was instantly clouded over.

"He is expected back at the castle to-morrow," he replied. Then as I looked hard at him, waiting to hear more, he broke out—

"Desmond went to Limerick yesterday in attendance on the President of Munster."

"The President of Munster!" I exclaimed. Then I stopped in the courtyard, put my hand on his arm, and gazing earnestly at him, asked, "What is the meaning of this?"

The President of Munster was the English Governor of all this part of Ireland, and I could not but think this was a strange piece of news. That he and the Earl of Desmond should be together, evidently on terms of friendship, boded no good to Grace O'Malley, or to myself, or to our cause.

"O," said Fitzgerald testily "the explanation is simple. The country is excited over the prospect of the coming of ships from Spain, and the President rode over from Limerick to Askeaton to see Desmond—ostensibly on a visit merely of courtesy, but in reality to spy out what was going on here. I would not have suffered him to enter the castle had I been

Desmond, but Desmond thought otherwise, saying the time was not yet ripe."

This was plausible, but did not account, I thought, for the moody looks of Fitzgerald. There was something behind all this, but I did not press him further, save to inquire—

"What is to prevent the President from seizing Desmond, and thrusting him into prison at Limerick?"

"He has a strong guard," said he, "and the President has very few soldiers in Limerick. Besides, he feels confident that Desmond will be true to the English."

"Has Desmond given him any pledge of good faith?"

"No. He places his trust in Desmond too fully for that."

When I thought over what I had been told, it seemed probable enough that the Earl concealed his real intentions under the mask of a pretended loyalty to the Queen, and would do so perhaps until the time, as he said, was ripe. Yet the uneasiness I always felt with respect to him increased in spite of this supposition.

Then it occurred to me that perchance Fitzgerald, now that he had had time to become better acquainted with his cousin, was not more satisfied with him than I, and that this was the reason for his change of aspect.

However, when I met the Earl next morning, my suspicions and fears melted away before the cordiality

with which he received me. And when I told him that my mistress was in the vicinity, he declared that there was nothing he desired more in all the world than to see her.

"The President of Munster," said he, "has just gone back to Limerick from here, and for a time at least we will be free from his spying on us. Nothing could have fallen out better," he continued, rubbing his hands together like one who was greatly pleased, "so tell your mistress to make haste and come."

Likewise his Countess, who was with him, bade me say to Grace O'Malley that she was welcome to Askeaton.

When I returned to my mistress, I repeated to her the messages; but I thought it right to tell her also that Desmond had been entertaining the President of Munster. As I dwelt upon this matter, and remembered Fitzgerald's manner, something seemed to knock at my heart, and my suspicions sprang up anew.

"He finds it needful," said Grace O'Malley, thinking of Desmond, "to wear a double face as affairs stand at present, but when the Spaniards arrive he will come forward without disguise as our leader."

And, in truth, when we were come to Askeaton, both the Earl and his Countess made so much of my mistress that I felt a sort of shame that I had ever had any distrust of him.

Great entertainments were given in her honour, all the noblemen and gentlemen of Desmond's household vying with each other in paying her court, while

the Earl himself seemed never to be able to see enough of her. Indeed, he showed her so much attention that it soon became apparent that she occupied a large part in his thoughts—so much was this the case that Richard Burke grew very jealous of him, nor did the Countess of Desmond regard the matter without displeasure.

Meanwhile the time was slipping by. Our galleys lay in the stream, and though I visited them frequently to make sure that they were safe, I could not but be aware that it was no good thing that they should be there, tied up in the Shannon, within easy reach of any English man-of-war that might ascend the river.

They were concealed, however, from view; but there was ever the fear in my mind that a rumour of our being at Askeaton would be bruited abroad, and come to the ears of the English. All the Burkes, and a considerable portion of our own O'Malleys, had been withdrawn from our vessels, and the force left upon them could scarcely be reckoned as formidable.

Another cause for uneasiness was that nothing more was heard of the landing of the Spaniards. I had many conversations with de Vilela, who was certain of their coming, but who knew the time of it no more than myself. He did not exhibit the impatience which possessed me, but in his heart I doubt not he longed for action as ardently as did I.

Of Fitzgerald I saw very little, for two days after the arrival of my mistress at Askeaton he rode over to Limerick, and there remained.

When I spoke of him to de Vilela, he said he had heard that Fitzgerald was madly in love with a lady who was staying in that city, and that that probably accounted for his being there. Knowing what Fitzgerald's disposition was, I could not forbear smiling, and now fancied that I had discovered the cause of his want of spirits in that he had not been very successful in his wooing.

I thought no more of him or of his affairs, little dreaming who the lady was, until the mention of her name one day filled me with lively feelings of astonishment and vexation, and, as I pondered this new and perplexing turn of events, with something close akin to terror.

It so happened that I was talking and jesting with one of the Geraldines, when the conversation came round to Sir Nicholas Malby, and the iron rule he had imposed on Galway and a large part of Connaught.

"Grace O'Malley," said he, "was more than a match for him."

"Sir Nicholas," said I, "is the best soldier the English have in Ireland, and if he did not prevail against my mistress, it was rather because he underrated her strength and her prowess, than from any other reason. He esteemed her as no more than a feeble woman, and so was deceived."

"By the way," asked he, "are you well acquainted with Galway?"

"Yes—well enough," replied I, somewhat crisply.

"And do you know the Mayor of the town, one Stephen Lynch?"

"Yes," I assented, wondering.

"A great merchant?" he inquired.

"The richest in Galway, perhaps in Ireland," I answered.

"With a daughter, an only child, who will inherit his whole wealth?"

"Yes," said I, wondering still more.

"Mistress Sabina Lynch?"

"The same," said I; "but why do you ask these questions?"

"The woman is beautiful, is she not?" he went on, without replying immediately to my query.

"No doubt of that," I replied.

"Rich and beautiful!" he exclaimed, and then he laughed very merrily.

"Tell me," said I again, "why have you sought to know all this?"

"Ask Dermot Fitzgerald," said he, and would say no more, but I understood—all.

Dermot Fitzgerald was in love with Sabina Lynch! And she was in Limerick, where were the President of Munster and his soldiers, and Fitzgerald too! Here, indeed, was a pretty heap of faggots, and it was my hand, as it were, that might have placed the fire beneath, and set it in a blaze!

I saw at a glance how easy it would be for Fitzgerald, without intending in any way to do mischief or to betray us to the English, to let drop a word or a hint that might suggest to a quick-witted woman to inquire further into his meaning, and that so dexterously as not to excite in the least any alarm on his part.

And what might not be looked for when she learned that Grace O'Malley, the woman she hated most, and Richard Burke, the man she loved best, were together at Askeaton? And Fitzgerald was said to be madly in love with her! He would therefore be as wax in her hands, and she could mould him to her will as she pleased. Small wonder, then, that I was disturbed, and felt that we were far from secure.

And now there fell out what, at the time, gave me the keenest regret and even pain, though afterwards it proved to be of the most inestimable service to us.

It had become very plain to anyone who gave it the slightest thought, or, indeed, to anyone who used his eyes, that Desmond was infatuated with my mistress. Every moment that he could find was spent in her society, to the neglect of other matters, however important they were. Before he had seen her he had been fascinated by what I had told him of her and her deeds; now that he saw her for himself, and marked how like a queen she was, he was as one bound hand and foot before her.

Grace O'Malley had a great power over men when she chose to exercise it; and now, on her side, she appeared not only to encourage him, but also to be bent upon his complete subjugation.

I marvelled at her, yet assured myself that she could have no love for the man, but that, perceiving the weakness of his character, she took this course in order to make certain of his firm adhesion to our

cause. But it was a course full of danger, for the strength of the passion of a man, even of a weak man, is no more to be reckoned up and measured than is the force of a mighty tempest, beginning in a breath and dying out in ruin.

Desmond's countess grew pale and silent, and I noted that the furtive glances she stole at my mistress were touched at first with dismay, then with anger. She must have known the kind of stuff of which her husband was made, but her rage, as might be seen, was directed wholly against my mistress. I felt a sort of compunction, and sometimes wished that we had never come to Askeaton at all.

And this wish was made much stronger, for Richard Burke, who bore and endured for awhile the utmost torture when he saw how matters stood between Grace O'Malley and the Earl, told me that he could suffer to see it no longer, and so was determined to speak to her and remonstrate with her.

What passed between them I do not know, but it was of such a nature that the MacWilliam shortly afterwards withdrew in high dudgeon from the castle with all his men.

I attempted to restrain him from going, but in vain. He admitted that he had received no promise from Grace O'Malley of her hand, but as she had not repulsed him utterly when he had preferred his suit to her, and had come to Kerry at her request, he had hoped that the matter was in a fair way to be settled as he desired. Now, he said, she had no thought of him, her whole mind being taken up with Desmond.

I endeavoured to gainsay this, but without success, and I had sorrowfully to witness the departure of the Burkes from Askeaton. I so far prevailed upon him, however, that he agreed to stay in the district, and, having obtained permission from the Earl, he pitched his camp a few miles away in the woods.

Richard Burke's troubles made me think of my own love affairs, which were in the same position as before, for, albeit, I had a secret, satisfying conviction that Eva O'Malley had no special regard for de Vilela, I still adhered to my resolution not even to appear to come between them. Wherein, perhaps, in my stupid pride, I did my dear, to say nothing of myself, a great injustice, for she might have supposed that I cared for nothing but the fierce, mad joy of battle. But never loved I anyone save her alone.

It was on the second or third day after Richard Burke had left us that the arrival of the messengers from the President of Munster with a letter for Desmond threw me into a state of great concern. And when I knew what the tenor of that letter was, I was disquieted the more, for I could but conclude that what I had dreaded would happen with respect to the intimacy of Sabina Lynch and Fitzgerald had indeed come to pass.

The Earl received the President's messengers with some state, several of his gentlemen and myself being with him.

As he read the letter they presented to him, he was evidently disconcerted by its contents, looking

now at it, now at the messengers; but when he had perused it a second time, he laughed strangely, and said he would give no answer at once, but would consider what was to be done.

In the evening, when we were all together in the great hall of the castle, my mistress also being of the company, he was in a boisterous humour, and bade his harpers sing of the glories of the house of Desmond. He sat beside Grace O'Malley, and I saw him, under cover of the music, speaking to her very earnestly; and presently he called me up to them.

"What think you, Ruari?" said my mistress, and her eyes danced and smiled, "what think you, does the President of Munster ask from the Earl of Desmond?"

"What is his demand?" cried I.

"Nothing less or more," said she, and the laughter suddenly went out of her face, "than that he should instantly deliver up a certain Grace O'Malley, as a notable traitress to the Queen and a spoiler of ships, at present lodged in his castle of Askeaton, and should forthwith cause her to be conveyed to him at the city of Limerick, to be there dealt with according to her deserts and the pleasure of her Highness. What think ye of that?"

"What says the Earl of Desmond?" cried I.

"What, indeed!" said she, answering for him, and turning to him with a smile.

"Ay—what, indeed!" said he, meeting her look, and smiling back at her.

At that instant there was a commotion at the further end of the hall, and there entered a man, with his garments stained with travel and befouled with mire.

As soon as de Vilela saw him he sprang forward with a great cry of delight, and, careless of us all, embraced him, while a sort of silence came upon us, and the bards ceased their singing; but the whisper soon and quickly ran among us that the Spaniards at last were come.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LANDING OF THE SPANIARDS.

It was a strange moment.

There were the representatives of the President of Munster, two of the justices from Limerick—these stood for the Queen.

There were Grace O'Malley, her gentlemen, and myself—proclaimed rebels.

There were Desmond and his Geraldines.

And now here were de Vilela and this stranger from Spain! And we were all met together in the great hall of the castle of Askeaton.

A strange moment, and a strange meeting!

De Vilela advanced towards Desmond, and, with that grace of manner which this man possessed in greater perfection than any other I have ever seen, presented the new comer to the Earl. I leant forward to catch the name. It was the family name of the famous Lieutenant of Santa Cruz, the still more celebrated Grand Admiral of Spain. A brother or a cousin of Martinez, I said to myself, as the two men bowed low before Desmond.

"Will your lordship permit?" said de Vilela. "Don Juan de Ricaldo, my friend and comrade!"

And the Earl extended his hand to Don Juan.

"You are welcome, señor," said Desmond, but

without much warmth, for was he not, as it were, between the devil and the deep sea, with England on the one side and Spain on the other?

Then he conversed with the two Spaniards in a low tone of voice, so that I could hear but imperfectly what was said, but it was impossible not to see that he was in great perplexity. The two messengers of the President looked darkly on, their countenances knit into scowls, while Desmond shot a curious glance at them now and again.

After a few minutes spent in this fashion, Don Juan, excusing himself on the score of being weary in the extreme from his journey, retired from the hall along with de Vilela. When they had withdrawn there was a constraint upon us all, no one caring to speak his thoughts, for what could we say that would not have been noted by those two sharp-eared gentlemen from Limerick?

For myself I was fair bewildered; but the one thing that bulked out most largely in my mind was the fact that now there must be an end of our uncertainty, as the Spaniards had come into the country, as I supposed, and the time for deeds, not words, was upon us.

Nor was our sitting in the hall prolonged that evening, for each one who was in authority preferred to say nothing, and while the others talked together in little knots, it was in whispers, and all were glad when the Earl gave the signal for retiring.

The same night I was awake from a sound sleep

by de Vilela, who bade me dress and go with him. We went into a room high up in the tower, and there were my mistress, Desmond, and de Ricaldo waiting for us.

"Ruari," said Grace O'Malley, her face bright with excitement, "this gentleman is Don Juan de Ricaldo"—we saluted each other—"and he is the bearer of news of the highest importance, which concerns us most nearly."

Don Juan bowed again.

"The ships of the King of Spain have arrived?" I asked, as my mistress paused.

"One ship has come," said she, "that of which Don Juan is the commander, and others are on the way. They set out at the same time, but a storm separated them; he has reached Ireland first, but the rest cannot be far off."

"'Tis the best of good news," cried I. "Would to God they were all beside our galleys on the Shannon!"

"Don de Ricaldo's ship lies off Dingle, on the coast of Kerry," said my mistress, smiling at my sally, "and the others must be guided to the same harbour. They may have already cast anchor elsewhere, or they may still be at sea. But I wish you to take *The Cross of Blood* and search for them. Both of these gentlemen," she nodded to the two Spaniards, "will accompany you."

"And then?" inquired I.

"You will then render them," said she, "any help they may require, as, for instance, choosing the most

suitable place for making a landing, or whatever it may be."

"And then?" asked I again.

"Return here," said she.

"May I ask," said I, "if any plans have been formed."

"They will depend," said Desmond, quickly "on the number of the Spanish soldiers—and on other things," he added, more slowly.

"You will go at once, Ruari?" asked Grace O'Malley, but her question was a command.

"At once," I agreed; then a thought came to me. "Richard Burke should be told of this," said I.

"All Ireland will have heard the news within a week," said Desmond impatiently, "and the MacWilliam among the rest."

This was true enough, but I made sure that he knew, for I sent a trusty man to his camp who told him what had taken place. I did this later that night.

As I was taking my leave I asked my mistress if she were satisfied that all was going well, and she replied that she was.

"You will stay on here till I return?" asked I.

"Surely!" It was Desmond who spoke.

I had half a mind to suggest to her that it might be better for her to go back to her own galley, but it seemed like a presumption on my part, and I held my peace.

But once we were on board *The Cross of Blood*,

swinging down the stream in the hours of the morning, I wished that I had been bolder.

Yet, what was there to fear? So I repeated to myself, but the fear came again and again. For there were Grace O'Malley and Eva in Desmond's power, the guard they had with them being of the slenderest now that Richard Burke was out of Askeaton with his gallowglasses, and I myself, with de Vilela and some of our choicest men, going further away with every mile.

Was she justified in placing herself so entirely in the hands of the Earl? There was the rub. My mistress, however, had declared that she was well pleased with the way in which our affairs were moving, and with that assurance I had perforce to be content. And I verily believe she had no doubt but that she could do with Desmond as she chose.

I had been ordered to keep a look-out for the Spanish ships, and I put in at various bays and havens where I thought it might be possible that they had anchored, but I reached Dingle without having seen anything of them. And I well remember that it was towards evening, after we had borne the blaze of the July sun all day, that we came up alongside of Don Juan de Ricaldo's vessel, and de Vilela and myself went on board of her with her captain.

Next morning I put out to sea again, and, sailing slowly down the coast for perhaps a couple of hours, fell in with the rest of the Spanish ships, tacking to the north-westward.

Having made signs that I wished to speak to them, they lay to. As I approached I saw a man waving his hand to me from the ship that was nearest us, and him I afterwards knew to be Sir James Fitzmaurice, a relative of the Earl of Desmond, and having the reputation of being a skilful soldier. He had already fought against the English in Ireland, but had been beaten by them, and compelled to sue for peace.

Beside him there stood three or four priests, and, a little way off, a group of men wearing armour, their swords shining brightly in their hands. There was also a goodly muster of footmen, having arquebuses, spears and other weapons. And my heart warmed when I beheld this array.

Quitting my galley, I went on board of the ship, and presently had told Fitzmaurice, who evidently was the leader of the expedition, who I was, and for what purpose I was come. I also delivered to him letters which de Vilela and de Ricaldo had given me for him. Having read these over very carefully, he began to ply me eagerly with many questions.

Was Desmond well? What preparations had he made to rise against the English? What was the general state of the country? Did its princes and chiefs know that he was coming, and were they ready to drive the English into the sea? Were the English in force, and where lay their army? Who was there now at Limerick?

All these and many other things did he inquire of

me, listening to my replies with the closest attention, comparing what I said with what was written in the letters I had brought, and making a commentary of his own. But I soon found out that he was in reality as well informed as I was.

Here was one, I said to myself, who was a very different man from Desmond. The way he bore himself was so instinct with firmness, courage and resolution that he at once instilled a feeling of confidence in all who met him. Then the questions he had addressed to me impressed me as being just such questions as a soldier and a man of action would ask. But what struck me most was that when he spoke of Desmond, while he said not a word in his dispraise, he was apparently not certain of him. And this was so much in my own manner of thinking of the Earl that my fear of him was intensified.

It was now my turn to ask questions, and I inquired how many men Fitzmaurice had with him, and if these were all, or were we to look for more?

"There are four hundred of us—Spaniards, Italians, Irish, and English; these English," he added, "are not of the Queen's religion. And as to what we may expect, Father Sanders will tell you more," and he turned to one of the priests standing near. "Father," said he to the priest, "this is Ruari Macdonald, foster-brother of Grace O'Malley of Erris and the Isles of Connaught."

"You have just come from Desmond," said Sanders; "I have heard something of what you have been saying, and your mistress is with us."

"Yes," I replied, "Grace O'Malley is at Askeaton."

"She is firm in the cause?"

"She, and all of us, are proclaimed rebels," cried I, "so you may judge for yourself."

Then he exchanged glances with Fitzmaurice, and continued, "And Desmond? what of him?"

Thereupon I gave them an account of what had occurred at Askeaton since our arrival there.

"I do not see," said Sanders, when I had done, "how the Earl could have acted otherwise. As he said, he had to wait till the time was ripe. But now, the time is ripe, and the Desmond war-cry will soon resound on every side!" And the priest looked fixedly at Fitzmaurice, who, however, remained silent.

Sanders then began speaking again, and told me how that the Pope had blessed the expedition, and had given both men and money, and would send more ere long. Next he took me to see a splendid banner, all blue and gold, with the figure of our Lord upon it, which he had received from Rome.

"This will march with our hosts," cried he, "and lead us on to victory!"

Now, with the priests and the mysteries of religion I have never had much to do, and while the spirit of the man was in itself a beautiful thing, and the banner, too, a thing beautiful to behold, yet I could not forbear from thinking that fighting men were what we most stood in need of, and that four hundred soldiers, however brave they were, even added

to our own, were far from being sufficient to drive the English out of Ireland. For I knew the English by this time, and that they were no mean foes.

And when I said what was in my mind to Fitzmaurice, who I was sure would agree with me, he replied that I must remember that the force he had with him was but the advance guard of a great army, which, even at that very instant, might be already on its way to our coasts. So I took fresh courage, and hoped for the best.

After we had had a long conversation I said that my present business was to see his ships safe into the harbour of Dingle, or into any other haven which might be selected in Kerry, and as de Ricaldo's vessel was not at Dingle, I purposed, if it was agreeable to him, to go on ahead in my galley and show him the way, as it were, to the place. To this he assented, and I went back to *The Cross of Blood*. We made Dingle soon thereafter, and I could see that Fitzmaurice and Sanders immediately got ready to land.

There had already gathered upon the shore a crowd of the Irish belonging to that part of Kerry. Partly, I imagine, to impress them, and partly because of the nature of the occasion itself, Fitzmaurice and Sanders had deemed that their landing afforded a fit opportunity for no little display. They had therefore arranged a sort of procession, and I watched it, as it moved along, with keen interest; nor was I cold and stolid myself at the sight of the joy of the country people, who received

it on shore with loud shoutings and a tumult of cheers.

Two friars, chanting a psalm, stepped first on shore ; behind them came a bishop, clad in the robes of his sacred office, with a mitre on his head and a pastoral staff in his left hand. His right hand was raised solemnly invoking a blessing on the land, and his lips moved as if in prayer, while the Irish knelt upon the shore as his feet touched the ground.

Then came Father Sanders, the banner which the Pope had consecrated waving above him, and, immediately after him, Fitzmaurice and those of knightly rank—gallant, mailed, long-sworded gentlemen every one ! And now the foot-soldiers, each in a company under its own captain, streamed from the ships—making altogether a brave show.

As soon as a camping place for the night had been chosen, Fitzmaurice appeared at the side of my galley, and, having come on board, said that the harbour of Dingle from its shape—the mouth of the bay being narrow—was one from which it would be difficult to escape in an extremity, and asked me to suggest another.

Whereupon I replied that the haven of Smerwick, four miles to the north across the tongue of land where we now were, would be more to his mind. And thither the next day Fitzmaurice marched his troops ; the ships were brought round, and, all his stores having been fetched ashore, he at once set his men to work, making a trench and fortifying the place.

As I had now accomplished the mission my mistress had entrusted me with, I set about preparing to return to Askeaton. But Fitzmaurice prevailed upon me to stay two or three days longer, telling me he had sent horsemen to Desmond with a letter, in which he had urged his kinsman to declare war against the Queen without delay, and saying the reply might be of such a character as to change my plans. He hoped the answer would be speedy, and in any case, he said, it was well that I should know exactly what the Earl wrote.

But several days passed, and still no word came from Desmond.

In the meantime, Sir John, a brother of the Earl, arrived at Smerwick. This man, with whom a hatred of the English was the chief passion of his life, greatly lamented the supineness of his brother, but he had no knowledge of the Earl's movements. There was no mistaking that Sir John was sincere, and when he asked Fitzmaurice, de Vilela, and myself to accompany him on his return to his castle of Tralee, where, he said, our reception would give full proof of his devotion to the cause, I for one gladly assented.

We took with us a considerable number of men, so as to guard against a surprise, but we reached Tralee without adventure of any sort.

Before we had gained the castle itself, however, we were met by one of Sir John's gallowglasses, who warned him that two officers of the English had arrived there that very day, and that, as one of them

was well known to Sir John, they had been allowed to enter within its walls without question.

Hastily calling a halt, we consulted together what was the wisest course to pursue. Sir John was for our going on, but Fitzmaurice thought it would be more prudent for Sir John to ride forward with his own attendants, and then, when night had fallen, we might secretly enter the castle.

"Who are the Englishmen?" asked I, thinking that they might be known to me.

"One is Carter, the Marshal of Munster," replied Sir John, "and the other is Davell, a captain in the garrison at Limerick."

I was acquainted with neither, but I remembered that I had heard of Davell, and what it was, and I looked steadily at Sir John.

"Sir John," said I, "the name of Davell is not unfamiliar to me, and, if my memory serve me aright, you must know him well."

"Yes," said he shortly; "he once stood between me and death in a former war. But what of that," added he grimly, "as things are now?"

I held my peace, whereupon he exclaimed passionately: "I will suffer nothing to stand between me and the deliverance of Ireland! Let us proceed."

Fitzmaurice, however, would not agree to this; so Sir John went on, as had been suggested, and we withdrew into the forest not far from the castle. But about midnight Sir John sent to say that the Englishmen had gone to bed, and that, as all was now quiet, he invited us to come. Nor did we refuse.

When we had entered within the silent castle, Sir John met us, and led us, who were leaders, into the hall, but our men lay down in the courtyard. When wine and meat had been put before us, the waiting-men going about on tiptoe, Fitzmaurice inquired of Sir John if we might be told on what business it was that Carter and Davell had come to Tralee.

"As spies. What else?" said Sir John. "The tidings of your landing have reached the ears of the President, and they have ventured hither for more news. They tell me they wish to see for themselves what is going on."

"What say they of Desmond?" I asked.

"They say—what I cannot believe," cried he, forgetting to whisper, as we had been doing; "they say that Desmond himself sent a letter to the President—a letter he had received from you," and here he glanced at Fitzmaurice—"and that he has offered to drive the Spaniards back to their ships."

We were all silent. As for me, my mind was as a blank, while my heart beat so furiously that it was like to rend my body.

"I will never believe it," said Sir John. "'Tis nothing but a base lie!"

In the anguish of my spirit I groaned aloud, so that the rest looked curiously at me.

"You believe it!" slowly said Fitzmaurice; "and, by the Mass! so do I."

"No, no!" exclaimed Sir John. "Not that—not that!"

Then he sprang from his place, and, even i

the dim light of the candles, I could not but see how ghastly was his face.

"Not that—not that!" he cried again, then with swift steps turned and left us.

I heard the sound of his feet as he went up the stair to the sleeping-rooms above; presently the noise ceased, but in another moment the stillness was rent by a piercing cry, quickly followed by another and another.

We gazed at each other fearfully, asking mutely what this might portend, when Sir John returned to the hall, his mantle and his hands stained with blood.

"Let this," cried he in wild accents, and he shivered as the blood dripped from him, "let this be a pledge of the faithfulness of the Desmonds to you and to the cause!"

"What have you done?" asked Fitzmaurice.

"There are no English spies alive now in Tralee," said he more calmly, "to carry tales to Limerick."

He had stabbed to death Carter and Davell, as they lay asleep, with his own dagger.

And one of them had saved his life, and both had counted themselves his friends!

I felt myself growing sick with horror of the man and his deed. To slay men in a fight was one thing, but to kill sleeping men under one's own roof was another and a very different thing.

And with the horror there came a nameless fear.

CHAPTER XX.

SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS.

ONCE the first shock of this terrible affair was over my thoughts were so many, and withal so dreary, that it was impossible for me to get any sleep in the short hours which yet remained before the day dawned.

I sought and found excuses for Sir John, but the excuses did not wholly satisfy me. For, if against this act of treachery of his, there might and could be set instances as base on the part of the English rulers of Ireland, that made it not the less foul.

He no doubt justified himself in his own sight by believing he had committed his brother, the Earl, irrevocably to the cause, and that now all his hesitation must cease. But would it? I asked myself.

Carter and Davell had declared that Desmond was in communication with the President of Munster; no sooner had I heard this than I felt it must be true. So, too, had said Fitzmaurice. And if it were, in what position, then, was Grace O'Malley?

After all, was it true?

Sir John had denied it; but had it not been

the very fear that it was true, which had driven him as by a sort of frenzy into this dark and dreadful act of slaying his defenceless guests?

And if Desmond were a traitor, where and in what case was my mistress?

And what of Eva?

One thing was clear, and that was that Tralee was no place for me. I now regretted deeply that I had not returned to Askeaton at once after the harbour of Smerwick had been chosen by the Spaniards, and determined to get back to *The Cross of Blood* and to set out for the stronghold of Desmond immediately, for it was there that I should be.

With the first blush of day I roused up my own men, and bade them be ready to march. As I was standing among them in the yard, both Fitzmaurice and de Vilela approached, and beckoned to me to join them. As I came up, a dozen horsemen or more swept past us, and fled across the bridge.

"There goes the rising of Munster," cried Fitzmaurice joyfully, nodding towards the horsemen. "They have been charged with messages to all the chiefs of the province, and before night has fallen the battle-cry of the Desmonds will have been sounded forth throughout the whole territories of the Geraldines."

"You have heard, then, from Desmond?" asked I, greatly relieved by his words.

"Not yet," replied he; "but, after last night,

Desmond can have no choice. Surely you must agree with me in that?"

"No," said I, very slowly. "I am not sure that I agree with you."

"Which means you do not!" cried he, with anger in his tones. "But why?"

It was not easy to put what I thought into so many words, and I did not answer at once.

"Why? why?" again asked Fitzmaurice.

"I can hardly tell you," replied I; "but you heard, as well as I did, the report of his dealings with the President, and"—here I spoke out quite bluntly—"I have no firm faith in Desmond."

"Perchance, he hesitated," said Fitzmaurice, "perhaps he did at the beginning; but all that will now be at an end. He must declare himself openly. His hand has been forced by Sir John, and he cannot stand out against us and his people."

"What are your plans now?" I asked, rather wearily, for I was tired of this incessant reference to Desmond.

"To wait at Tralee till I hear from him," said he. "You will wait also?"

"No," said I, "I return to Smerwick to-day."

"Return to Smerwick? I shall not let you!"

"Indeed," said I, with some heat. "You are not my commander, and I owe you no obedience. It is not yours to say what I shall do; that is the right of my mistress alone."

"Your mistress!" said Fitzmaurice with a sneer.

My hand went to my sword, but de Vilela, who

had so far taken no part in the conversation, interfered.

"Señor," said he to Fitzmaurice sternly, "you can mean no disrespect to the lady, Grace O'Malley; she is my dear friend——"

"Señor," said I, interrupting him, "this affair is mine."

"Señor Ruari," said he, "had any offence been intended, it would have been mine, too."

Fitzmaurice, who quickly saw that he had made a mistake, declared that he had neither said nor implied anything to the despite of my mistress, but his look was sullen, and I wondered at him.

It was apparent that he had something on his mind that was not favourable to her, but he said no more. It was possible that he had heard about her in connection with Desmond, so I concluded, and this urged me to the more haste in leaving Tralee.

"I am going to Smerwick at once," said I to them both.

Fitzmaurice was about to speak, but, changing his mind, walked away. De Vilela then asked me why I was in so great a hurry to be gone.

"My place is with my mistress," said I briefly, for I could not tell him my thoughts.

"That is a true word," said he; and there was a strange catch in his voice, so that I looked at him curiously, expecting him to say more, but he was silent.

No objection being made to our departure, my

men and I left Tralee, and, before night had set in we were at Smerwick. Having saluted the officers of the Spanish ships, and acquainted them with my intention, I weighed out from Smerwick the following morning, and on the third day came up with *The Grey Wolf* and *The Winged Horse*, which were quietly riding at anchor in the bay, not far from the castle of Askeaton.

Many had been the questionings of my spirit as we had gone up the Shannon; many my doubts and fears of I knew not quite what; but the mere sight of the galleys, thus peacefully resting on the water like a pair of great sea-birds, dispelled them at once.

Tibbot, who had been in chief command during the absence of Grace O'Malley and myself, came on board of *The Cross of Blood* as soon as we had let go our anchor, and I could see from the very way he carried himself that all was well with the ships. He had nothing stirring to tell me, so it appeared, but was exceedingly anxious to hear about the men from Spain, and what was being done.

But before I had gratified him in this respect, I inquired when he had last seen or had word of our mistress, and he answered that she and the Earl of Desmond and a numerous party had visited the galleys a day or two after I had sailed down the river; and that, since then, he had had no tidings of her. Nothing, moreover, save vague rumours of Fitzmaurice and the Spaniards had reached him through the people living on the shore of the stream.

So far as was known, Desmond still lay at Askeaton, and had not joined in the rising against the Queen.

Tibbot seemed sure that everything and everybody remained at the castle in the same position as when I had left it; but I resolved to go thither without loss of time, and to see for myself how the land lay.

I charged Tibbot in the meantime not to allow our men to wander away, but to keep them, as far as possible, in the galleys, and so to be prepared for any emergency. And I enjoined upon him that he was not to offer attack, but only to stand on his defence in case of assault.

Having spoken in the same terms to Calvagh, who was to act as Tibbot's lieutenant, I took but one attendant, thinking that if more went with me I should not be able to get to Askeaton as quickly as I wished.

It was not yet evening as I came in sight of Askeaton, and as I gazed down upon it from the high ground opposite, I noticed that there was nothing unusual in its appearance, except that the drawbridge was up, and that there were perhaps a few more soldiers on the walls than was customary. Descending the edge of the stream I shouted to the watch, peering at me through the wicket, to open the gate. I could not but have been well known to them, but I was kept waiting for some minutes—at which I marvelled much. I had no thought, however, of turning back.

At length, the chains of the drawbridge, as they clashed and clattered through the sheaves, began to move, and the bridge fell into place, the gate being opened at the same instant.

What followed was so sudden that I have only a confused recollection of it.

My feet had no more than trodden the creaking planks of the drawbridge, as it seemed to me, or I may have been just within the door, when I was set upon by several of Desmond's men.

I was taken completely off my guard, albeit I struggled with all my strength, but, being at a disadvantage, this availed me not a whit. In any case, I must soon have been overpowered; but the matter was the quicker settled by a blow on my head, under which I went down like a felled ox.

When I had come somewhat to my senses again, it was to find myself sick and giddy from the blow, while my hands and feet were tightly bound with ropes, so that my flesh was chafed and cut; there had been a gag thrust into my mouth, and my eyes were bandaged. I could not speak, nor see, nor move. I could feel I was lying on the earth, but where I was I knew not.

"He is coming to himself," said a voice. My brain was reeling, reeling, reeling; but there was that in the voice that seemed not strange, yet I could not remember whose it was, so far off was it—as if from another world.

"Put him——" and there were other words that came to me, but so indistinctly that I could not

make them out at all; nay, I could not tell, being in a stupor, whether I was awake or did only dream.

Then I was taken up and carried along—up steps and steps which appeared to be without end, and at last was thrown upon a wooden floor. A door was shut and bolted and barred; and thereafter a sound of retreating footsteps dying away, and I was left alone. I was wide awake now, for my body was one great, almost insupportable pain.

And terrible as was the anguish of my frame, that of my mind was more; but first came the racking of the bones and the torture of the flesh, and these, in their turn, brought consciousness and memory, and an indescribable agony of the soul.

I tried to move—a thing well-nigh impossible to me, trussed up as I was, and by reason also of the pain I suffered; and I was constrained to abandon the attempt. I should have borne up better perhaps if my eyes had been open and my tongue free; but there I lay in the darkness, like one already dead, and had nearly given way to despair.

And as the shadows and mists of stupor cleared away from my mind, I was overwhelmed at the extent of the disaster which had befallen me, for I saw in it but too surely an indication of some dreadful evil, some fearful calamity which had overtaken my mistress and her fortunes, and that, too, at the hands of Desmond.

And I was powerless to help her! I had allowed myself to be caught—running, blind fool that I was, my own head into the noose.

Where was she?

Where was Eva?

What had happened?

What was to be the end? Was this it?

Around such questions as these did my thoughts move, as if in a circle; ever asking the same questions, and ever without reply; until I felt that there was no more than the breadth of a thread between me and madness.

After a great while—how long I wist not, and perchance it was no such great while as it seemed to me in that wild fever of my spirit—the door of the room in which I lay huddled upon the floor was opened. I verily believe that it was the mere opening of the door at that very moment that kept me from becoming a maniac, so strained were those fine chords which subtly hold mind and body as if in a balance.

The bandage was untied from about my eyes, and the gag was taken from my mouth; the ropes were partly unloosened from my arms, and food and water were placed beside me.

Two men were in the room, both bearing drawn swords, and one carrying a lantern, for it was night, and but for its light we had been in total darkness. Yet so sore were my eyes that I could scarcely bear to look at the men, and when I essayed to speak I could not utter a word so swollen was my tongue.

“Eat and drink,” said one of them; but I could do no more than roll my head helplessly from side to side.

Then the other, seeing how foredone I was, put the pitcher to my lips, and I drank, although each mouthful I swallowed of the water was a fresh torment. But with the blessed water there came relief, nay, life itself, for the frenzy died out of my brain, and my mind became calm and clear. Thereafter I ate, and essayed to speak with the two men, but they had evidently been forbidden to converse with me, for they would answer nothing. After a short time they withdrew, bolting and barring the door behind them, and I was left to myself.

Hours dragged slowly by, and, at length, the sleep of exhaustion fell upon me, and when I awoke it was broad daylight. The repose had restored me in a great measure to myself; but the stinging of the cuts made by the bonds on my legs and arms, and the dull throbbing, throbbing of my head, quickly recalled me to the misery of my situation.

In the morning, however, I was released from the ropes, and more food and water were brought me. Again I endeavoured to get the men, who I perceived were the same that had come to me the previous evening, to speak to me, but in vain.

Before they had made their appearance I had seen that I had not been cast into one of the dungeons of Askeaton, but was imprisoned in a chamber which I judged, numbering the steps up which I had been borne, to be at the top of one of the towers of the castle. As soon as they had gone I set about examining the room, albeit I was so stiff and sore that at first I could only crawl and

creep on the floor. As this exercise, however, gave me back the use of my limbs, I was soon able to stand and move about with ease.

The room was small and bare, without even a stool or a bench, and was lighted by a little, narrow window, from which I caught glimpses of distant masses of trees and the slopes and peaks of far-off mountains. During my first visit to Desmond, I had made myself familiar with every part of the castle, and I knew that the surmise I had made that the room was high up in a tower was a true one.

There were only the two ways of getting out, the one by the door, the other by the window. The door was firmly secured, for I had tried it, but I might as well have sought to move the stone walls of the chamber. And the window was many feet above the ground or the river, so that it was impossible to escape by it, unless by means of a ladder or a rope, neither of which I possessed.

It therefore required very little reflection on my part to understand how complete was my captivity, and how small was the chance of my being able to deliver myself from it.

But it was something that I could see, that I could breathe freely, and that I could speak aloud, and hear, at least, the sound of my own voice. And these somehow brought with them a faint ray of hope. As I paced up and down the room—that I was permitted to go without chains showed in itself how convinced my gaolers were that I could not

break free—I determined not to despair. But as the day passed wretchedly by, and night came on again, it was difficult to keep any degree of firmness in my heart.

A thing which kept constantly recurring to me was the haunting recollection of the voice I had heard, or fancied that I had heard, after I had been struck down, and was half-alive and half-dead, and so certain of nothing. Then, knowing, as I well did, what was the usual horrible fate of one taken prisoner, I could not but ponder with surprise the comparative tenderness shown me.

I had not been thrown into a noisome cell beneath the castle, or, what would have been worse still, under the bed of the stream, and left to die of madness and hunger, a prey to rats and other vermin.

Nay, I asked myself why I had not been slain outright? That, it was manifest, had not been the purpose of those who had set upon me, for, once I was down, nothing could have been easier than to despatch me.

Then, whose voice was it that I had heard? For the life of me I could not remember.

When evening was come, food and water were provided as before, but in the same obduracy of silence. The men were as speechless as mutes, beyond one saying, "Eat and drink," and I was strangely glad and even moved to hear these simple words.

Once more being left to the solitude of my

prison-chamber, a thought came, sharply shooting like an arrow, through my sombre musings. The same two men always appeared with the food; just two men, I told myself, *against one*. True, they were armed, and I was not; but might not a quick, dexterous, unexpected assault give me my opportunity? And if I could but get out of the room, could I not trust to my star, and to my knowledge of the castle, to find some way of escape? And if I failed? Well, the worst was death, and I had faced it before. And so the project grew, and took a firm hold of me.

Not thus, however, had it been ordained.

So agitated was I by the mere prospect of regaining my liberty, that it was long ere I went to sleep, and then methought I dreamed a happy dream.

There was, as it were, a light in that mean room—not a great brightness, but a dimly burning light, itself a shadow among other shadows. And behind that shadow, a pale presence and a ghostly, stood Eva O'Malley, and by her side a muffled figure, vague and indistinct, but seen darkly as in a mirror over which the breath has passed. Clearer, and yet more clearly, there were bodied forth the face and form I knew and loved; her hand touched me, and my name was whispered softly in my ear.

“Ruari! Ruari!”

I heard the rustle of her garments; then the shadow danced along the wall and died away, as the light came closer to my face.

“Ruari! Ruari!”

"O my love! my love!" cried I.

"Ruari! Ruari! Come!" said she.

"Hush! Hush!" said the muffled figure, and all at once I was aware that this was no dream, but a verity.

This was no other than my dear herself.

And the muffled figure—who was that? A man's voice surely had I heard say "Hush!" And why were they come? Wherefore, indeed, but to deliver me. And I sprang up from the floor in haste.

"Softly, softly," said Eva, as I clasped her hand—a living hand, thank God!

Then she whispered low that for the present they must leave me, for if we all went together, the suspicion of the guards might be aroused, but that I must find my way out as best I could. Her words bewildered me, but there was no time for explanations, which would come afterwards.

"You must contrive to get down by yourself to the court," said she. "We will meet you there, but wait here first for about an hour, then start. You will find the door of this room open; take the left turn, and make no noise or you will be lost."

I did as I had been bid. After what I supposed might be an hour I felt my way out of the room, and stepping slowly and with a cat's wariness succeeded, but with many quakings and alarms, in reaching the great hall without attracting the attention of anyone. Never could I have done this had I not been familiar with the castle, and even as it was I had frequently to stop perplexed.

In the hall were many men asleep, each with his weapon by him, as I could see, though uncertainly, from the dull glow of the embers on the wide hearth. Near the fire itself sat two men, and for awhile I looked at them fearfully, for past them must I go. But as I watched them carefully I saw their heads nodding, nodding—they, too, were asleep.

Out through the slumberers did I step, praying dumbly that they might not waken through any slip of mine, and, reaching the door in safety, was, in another moment, in the court.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PERFIDY OF DESMOND.

"RUARI!" said Eva O'Malley; "here!"

It was that darkest time of night that preludes the day, and I could see no one with any degree of clearness, but, guided by that beloved voice, I went forward, nothing doubting.

Straining my eyes into the blank, I made out figures, moving towards the gate; Eva came to my side, and we followed close upon them. Mystified as I was at what had just occurred, it gave me a delicious thrill of happiness to be near Eva, and to feel myself a free man again.

"Eva!" I said.

"Do not speak—do not speak," said she, "we are not yet out of danger."

In silence then we walked through the court until we had come to the guard-house by the gate, and there we halted. One of those with us went into the room, and I could hear, though indistinctly, the sounds of him and others talking together.

Some long minutes passed, and the suspense was becoming unendurable, when two men with lanterns appeared. Without looking at us they proceeded to lower the drawbridge, the rattling of whose chains was to me then the finest music in the world, and to open the gate.

"Quick," said Eva to me, pushing me gently on.

I was over the bridge and on the further side in a flash along with two others; turning back I heard an exclamation from the watchmen with the lanterns, and some expostulations.

"'Twas not in the bargain," I caught; then there were more words which I heard too imperfectly to understand, but I recognised from the mere tone of one of the voices who the speaker was.

And with this there dawned on me also whose was the voice I had heard after I had been struck down. It was Dermot Fitzgerald's! And he it was who was our guide!"

In what way he satisfied the watchmen I do not know, but, having done so, he and Eva crossed the bridge. Then there was a whistle, and now a horse neighed; and thereafter the trampling of chargers broke upon the ear. The horse-boys brought the animals up to us, and presently we were in the saddle, moving off from the castle notwithstanding the gloom, Fitzgerald leading the way.

I wondered where we were going, but I had been told not to utter a word, in the one brief sentence I had exchanged with Eva when we were mounting the horses, and I followed on after her as I would have done to the end of the world, but I was fair dazed with these strange, fantastic tricks of fortune.

We had gone about a couple of leagues, as I conjectured, from Askeaton, riding for the greater part of the distance through the forest, when Fitzgerald stopped—and so did we all.

The darkness had grown perceptibly less intense, and we could now see a sort of path among the trees.

"I have done what I promised you," said Fitzgerald to Eva O'Malley. Then he turned towards me. "Ruari Macdonald," said he, "my debts to you are also paid. Farewell, and God help and pity us all!"

"Dermot!" cried I.

But he was already past me, galloping fast and furiously, like one hotly pursued.

"He has gone," said Eva, and there was a sob in her voice.

In an instant I had leaped from the saddle, and was by her side. Her form was bowed forward upon her horse's neck, and her tears were falling heavily, as I placed my arm about her waist, and drew her towards me, heedless of those who were with us.

"Eva, darling," I said. "What does all this mean?" Not that I cared to be told at that moment; it was enough that we were together. I pressed her to my heart, and kissed away her tears while she struggled with her emotions. I spoke many words of endearment, and after awhile she regained her calmness.

"Let us ride on," she said at length.

"But whither are we going?" asked I.

"To the camp of Richard Burke," she replied; "it is only three or four miles ahead of us—so Dermot Fitzgerald said. And he has shown himself our friend after all."

"To Richard Burke?" cried I, more amazed, if that were possible, even than before.

"Have patience, Ruari," said she, "you must soon know everything ; but be patient——"

"Our mistress?" asked I, at no time very patient, and now devoured with questions.

"Wait a little, wait a little," said she, and she broke into weeping again, so that my heart smote me at the sight of her grief. But when I would have taken her in my arms again to try to comfort her, she waved me off, and, shaking up her horse, rode on in front.

The day breaking clearly as we went along, I observed that those behind me were two women of my mistress's and Eva's, and the man I had brought with me from *The Cross of Blood* to Askeaton. My mind was now in such a tangle that I had to resign myself passively, and to become, as it were, rather a spectator of than a participator in what was going on.

In truth, I felt more at sea than ever before in my life, and was even inclined to prick myself, like a boy, to see if we were indeed living, or merely moving in some spectral land of shades and phantoms.

Nor did this air of unreality wear away until we had arrived at the camp of the Burkes. But as we emerged from the trees into the open, we were at once recognised by those on guard, for they had seen both Eva and myself frequently in the galleys, and thus we were well known to them.

They raised so loud and fervent a shout of welcome that the MacWilliam quickly appeared on the ground to ascertain what was happening. He gazed at us like one sorely puzzled; then, as he

came forward to greet us, there was an expression of alarm.

"Eva O'Malley!" he exclaimed. Then he came up to me, and as I held out my hand he gasped with astonishment, for my hands were bleeding from the unhealed cuts inflicted by the ropes with which I had been tied, my dress was in disorder, and my feet, which were bare, were spattered with blood.

"What has happened?" cried he hoarsely. "Where is your mistress? What? What?"

"Fetch wine," said I, partly to divert his thoughts, partly because it seemed as if Eva were about to swoon. "Go, fetch us wine!"

"Yes, yes!" said Eva faintly. Then, with an effort of the will, she added, "I will tell you everything—when I have recovered a little."

Leading us to his tent, he called for wine, and when Eva and I had drunk, and our attendants also, she and the MacWilliam and I were left by ourselves, all the others being told to withdraw.

"Have you heard?" she asked, looking at Burke.

"Nothing," replied he, "save that the Spaniards are come. The messenger Ruari sent told me that de Ricaldo had arrived at Askeaton, and I have since heard that their ships lie at Smerwick."

"Nothing more?" asked Eva.

And he shook his head.

"I hardly am less in the dark than yourself," said I. "All that I know besides is that when I returned to Askeaton from Smerwick no more than two days ago, I was set upon in entering the castle, over-

powered, knocked senseless, bound, and made a prisoner."

"Made a prisoner!" cried Richard Burke. "God's wounds! And why?"

"That I as yet know not," I answered. "But Eva will perhaps inform us; this very night did she and Fitzgerald deliver me out of Askeaton."

Richard Burke gazed from one to the other of us, too much astonished to speak. I looked at Eva, whose eyes were sad and weary, but the colour was in her cheeks and her lips trembled only a very little.

"Yes," said she, "I can tell you; but let me begin at the beginning."

"More wine?" said I, and she took a sip from the goblet I handed to her.

"I am tired," said she, with a moan like that of a hurt child; "but you must know all, and that quickly. You remember the night in which Juan de Ricaldo reached Askeaton?" asked she of me.

"I left some hours later that very night," I replied, "to meet the Spanish ships."

"You remember also that two of the justices of Munster had come from Limerick with a letter from the President demanding that Grace O'Malley should be sent to him, so that he could cast her into prison?"

"I had not heard of that!" exclaimed Burke.

"Yes," I said; "I well remember it."

"Oh, how am I to tell it!" said Eva piteously, and I bled for her in all my veins. "But say on I must. Perchance," continued she, speaking to me

again, "you observed that Garrett Desmond was infatuated with her, and that she did not rebuke him as she might have done?"

"It was to keep stiff that weak back of his," said I, "and to get him to declare boldly against the Queen."

Richard Burke's face was like a black cloud, and a groan, deep and terrible, came from his lips.

"That was it," said Eva. "Do I not know that it was?" said she to Burke. "Ay, well do I know it. And Desmond, too, knows it now."

"Desmond knows!" cried Burke more cheerfully, and he looked almost happy. This was not my case. What horrible thing was coming? I asked myself, for that something horrible had taken place I had no doubt whatever, and my spirits sank like a stone.

"Listen," said Eva. "Desmond sent back the two justices empty-handed to the President, but what he bade them tell him I cannot say. When they departed I noted their demeanour, and it was not that altogether of men who were wholly dissatisfied with the issue of their mission. Even then," cried she, with a fierceness the like of which was never seen in her before, "I believe he meditated treachery."

"Treachery! A Desmond a traitor!" said Burke, upon whose countenance the cloud had come back, for the drift of Eva's words was clear enough.

"No sign, however," said she, "did the Earl show of anything of the kind. Never was he gayer than during the next few days, and I hoped that all was as fair for Grace O'Malley's plans as it seemed. Two

days after you had gone, Ruari, he and his chief men and our mistress and myself, with a great host of attendants, went down the stream from the castle, and made a visit to the two galleys lying in the bay."

"Tibbot told me of it," said I.

"Desmond had a purpose in it," said Eva, "as I can see now. He wished to show Tibbot his friendship for our mistress, and never after that manifestation of it would Tibbot suspect, he thought, that there would be aught amiss with her at Askeaton in so long as she was with him."

"A shrewd trick," said I bitterly.

"What has taken place? Where is Grace O'Malley?" cried Burke, restless, troubled, tortured even.

"I know not where she is," said Eva slowly, while the tears gathered in her eyes. "I know not."

"What?" cried he.

"Patience," urged I, myself consumed with impatience, anger, and a multitude of terrible passions.

"Let me go on," said Eva, with a choke. "It was shortly after we had returned from the ships," continued she bravely—"three or four days perhaps—when there was a great stir at the castle, for messengers had come with tidings of the landing of the Spaniards. A letter, too, they brought from Sir James Fitzmaurice, who was in command, as it appeared, of the expedition. I questioned one of the messengers," said Eva shyly, "if he had seen you, Ruari, and he told me that he had."

I secretly blessed my dear for this reference to

me, but as I did not desire to interrupt her story I kept silence.

"We were all in good heart," said she, "by reason of the coming of the men from Spain, and Grace O'Malley in particular rejoiced exceedingly. Desmond himself, however, was strangely quiet. Then that night—How can I tell you?" and she broke down utterly and wept aloud.

Burke's eyes were full of fright, but mine too brimmed over when I looked at my dear and saw her shaken with sobs. And I wept also, nor am I ashamed of these tears of sympathy.

"'Tis no time to weep," said she after a pause, and resumed her tale, but in broken accents. "That night, as we were retiring to sleep, I observed that Grace O'Malley had lost all her gaiety and brightness, and was in some great distress of mind. I implored her not to withhold her confidence from me, and to tell me what was her trouble.

"Then it appeared that Desmond had read to her the letter of Fitzmaurice, and, when she had heard it to the end, declared that he had placed his whole future in her hands, as he loved her passionately and could not live without her. If she would consent to become his wife, it would be a very easy matter to get a divorce from the countess, and thereafter they would be married."

"His wife!" ejaculated Burke.

"If she agreed, he said, to this proposal," continued Eva, "she might do with him and all the Geraldines as she had a mind, and he would

immediately put himself at the head of the rebellion against the Queen, if that was her wish."

Richard Burke, unable to control his feelings any longer, jumped to his feet.

"What was her reply?" he demanded.

"Wait—wait for another moment," entreated Eva.

"Patience," urged I once more, though God knows I had no stock of it myself.

"If she refused——" said Eva.

"She did refuse," cried Burke.

"If she refused," continued Eva, "to become his wife, then not only would he not join with the Spaniards, but he would aid the English against them. When she pointed out to him that he had compromised himself both by his intercourse with Spain and with Fitzmaurice, and also by harbouring herself, a proclaimed rebel, he hinted—for at first he would not put his thoughts into so many words—that he knew of a way in which he might very readily make his peace with the President of Munster, and that was by sending to him a pledge of his fidelity to the Queen, which he was well informed would be acceptable to him and to her Highness."

"Fidelity to the Queen!" exclaimed I, glowing with wrath.

Any child could have foreseen what was coming. My mistress had indeed played with fire, and it needed no wizard to tell me that she had been scorched by its flames.

"Grace O'Malley," Eva went on, not heeding my interruption, "did not fail to understand his meaning.

She herself was the pledge of his fidelity to which he had referred. She must give herself to him, or he would betray her to the English; that, and not obscurely, was the threat he made—that, and nothing else. And she knew that she was in his power.”

“Horrible, horrible!” said Burke in anguish.

“Desmond,” said Eva, “strove, however, to conceal the trap under the cloak of an appeal to her devotion to the cause. She had only to say the word, and the standards of the Geraldines would be arrayed against the Queen, and then, with the English so unprepared as they were, success was certain. It rested with her. Hers was it to bid him go or stay.”

It was a strong temptation, I thought, but I was too overcome to speak.

“Then,” continued Eva, “he sought to inflame her ambition. As his wife, suggested he, might she not become not only Countess of Desmond and the greatest lady in the south, but even Queen of Ireland, once the English had been driven out of the country?”

Another strong temptation, thought I.

Desmond had certainly played his cards adroitly enough. He had sought to touch her through her hatred of the English, her love for her country, and her ambition—all powerful forces. Women had sacrificed themselves, nay, had willingly given themselves, for less. And I could well understand that to a soul like hers self-sacrifice was very possible.

“But even,” said Eva, “in the background of all

his speaking, there lurked, like an evil beast, that hint of what he would do, if she refused to submit herself to him."

After all, I said to myself, Desmond was a fool, for that was the worst way to address a woman who had the spirit of my mistress.

"To gain a little time, perhaps to escape from Askeaton," continued Eva, "Grace O'Malley asked to be allowed the night to consider what he had said. And to this he agreed, saying roughly, however, as they parted, that she must have her answer ready for him in the morning, and that there must be an end to trifling. All this she told me, and then we sought some way of escape, but Desmond had taken good care that there should be none, for we soon found that we were prisoners."

"She had no intention of consenting to Desmond," said Burke, and his voice was full of pride and joy.

"No," said Eva, looking at him with kind eyes, notwithstanding the grief in which she was.

"Go on, go on," urged I, half vexed with them both.

"I know not," said Eva, "what was said or done when the morning came, but I have not even seen her since." And her tears fell fast again, while Burke and I were smitten into a gloomy silence.

"Have you heard nothing of her?" asked I, at length.

"One of my women—she is here now—found out that Desmond had taken her to one of his castles

nearer to Limerick than Askeaton is, with what object may be easily guessed."

Burke started up madly.

"What is to be done? What is to be done?" cried he.

"A moment!" said I, and I turned to Eva.

"There is more to tell, is there not?"

"Yes," replied she. "After Grace O'Malley had been carried away I was given a certain liberty, for I was permitted to move about a part of the castle, although I was always watched. One day I chanced to see Dermot Fitzgerald, and though he tried to avoid me as soon as he perceived me, I ran up to him and caught him by the arm. I begged and entreated him by our old friendship to tell me what had become of our mistress, and what was going on.

"When he would not answer, I went on my knees," said my dear, bravely, looking at me, "and reminding him of what I had done for him when he lay wounded, and of what Grace O'Malley had done both for him and de Vilela, besought him to have some pity on me, a woman."

"Go on, go on!" said I hoarsely.

"He was so far moved," said Eva, "as to tell me that my mistress was well, and that no hurt would be done me. Not that I thought about myself. I saw him again once or twice, and besought him to find some means by which I might communicate with Grace O'Malley, but he said that was impossible. Then I implored him to set me free, but that, too, he said was not in his power."

Eva stopped speaking; then she began again, her voice strangely soft and tender.

"I saw you, Ruari, carried up the stairs two days ago—bound, bleeding, almost dead as it seemed, and Fitzgerald was along with the men who bore you in their arms. Later that evening I saw him, and anxiously asked what had occurred. I now perceived that he was unhappy, like one burdened with remorse.

"Then he said that you had come to the castle unexpectedly, and that, while it was deemed necessary to make you a prisoner, no violence had been intended towards you. He declared that he would give all the world if only it would put our affairs right again; indeed, he was like one gone clean mad with trouble, exclaiming that he was the cause of all our woes!"

"The cause of all our woes!" cried I.

"You remember Mistress Sabina Lynch, Ruari," said Eva. "She it was, said he, who had told the President of Munster to demand Grace O'Malley as a pledge from Desmond of his loyalty to the Queen, and it was through him—for he loves this woman—that she knew our mistress was at Askeaton, though he had never meant to betray her."

Verily, as I said before, if I failed in my duty when I suffered Sabina Lynch to live, I was grievously punished for it.

"Yet not so does it appear to me," said Eva, as if she had seen into my heart! "For Desmond is Desmond—a mass of treachery, a thing, a beast! But when I saw how Dermot Fitzgerald felt about the matter, I implored him to try to set you, Ruari,

at least, at liberty. And he was the more ready to listen to me because of this very Sabina Lynch, for, said he, she owed her life to you, and he wished to pay back the debt for this woman, whom he loves."

Richard Burke kept muttering to himself, repeating, as I thought, "Sabina Lynch! Sabina Lynch!" and what else I could not guess.

"Next day," said Eva, "a large number of the Geraldines left Askeaton, and Fitzgerald, being won over entirely to me, told me he would endeavour that night, there being but few men in the castle, to effect your escape and mine also. In the evening the gallowglasses drank deep—deeper even than they knew, for their wine and aqua vitæ had been drugged—and then, when all was still, he came to me who was ready, waiting. I asked him where you were, and he replied that he wished me to go with him to you, as you would trust me, and not, perhaps, him."

"I see it all," said I.

"Going up to the room where you lay," continued Eva, "we heard a noise; that made us pause, then we went on again—and you know the rest. The noise we had heard had so far alarmed us that we thought it best to tell you what we did. Fitzgerald had seen to everything—said I not rightly that he was my friend?"

And now Burke cried again, as Eva stopped speaking, "What is to be done? What is to be done?" For myself, while I echoed his question, I was in so great a coil that I was as one dumb.

CHAPTER XXII.

"ONLY A WOMAN."

"WHAT is to be done?" asked Richard Burke.

"We must find out, first of all, where Grace O'Malley is." It was Eva who spoke, and what she said was true. Our mistress must now be our chief—nay, our whole concern.

"Yes, yes!" cried I, roused to action, and looking with admiration at this weak little woman, who had shown herself so strong.

"Let us call in the woman you spoke of," said Burke. "She may remember something which will put us on the scent."

"I fear she has told me all that she knows," said Eva; "but summon her here."

While we waited for her I was going over what Eva had told us, and trying also to recall exactly what had been the words used—even more than the words, the manner of Fitzmaurice—when I had parted from him at Tralee. And as I considered the matter the conviction was borne in upon me that he had had some information as to what had happened in regard to Desmond and my mistress, but that he had purposely said nothing of it to me.

For one thing, he had evidently intended to keep me with him, and so to prevent me from returning

to Askeaton; and, for another, he had spoken of Grace O'Malley in a way which was little short of an insult, and which I was quick to resent. Then de Vilela had intervened between us, Fitzmaurice had made an apology, and I had left Tralee without opposition or further words.

What had de Vilela said when I had declared that my place was with my mistress? That I had spoken a true word, and I remembered that when he uttered this it was with little of his customary serenity of demeanour.

I concluded, as I reflected on what had passed, that both Fitzmaurice and de Vilela must have been aware—at least, to some extent, of Desmond's base conduct with respect to her.

Nor was the cause of this silence far to seek. But imperfectly informed, most probably, of the whole circumstances, and what they had heard having reached them from some source favourable to Desmond, they were, perhaps, inclined to lay the blame upon my mistress.

Then, the Earl's adhesion to the cause was so essential for its success that whoever jeopardised it would be looked upon with hatred, and thus they would be the more prejudiced against her.

Yet Fitzmaurice had himself told me in effect that he was not sure of Desmond, and this before he knew anything of Grace O'Malley. Perchance, however, he had persuaded himself that he believed what he wished to believe.

And de Vilela? He had sprung to the defence

of my mistress, but if he knew what had occurred, why had he not spoken out? No doubt, I told myself, it was because, while he was ready to uphold her honour, he deemed that his duty towards his master, the King of Spain, was paramount, and he had therefore submitted to Fitzmaurice, who was his leader, and who had enjoined silence upon him. This, I surmised, was the explanation.

How much did they know?

Could they say, I wondered, where Desmond had put my mistress?

Where was she at this moment?

The tire-woman had now entered the tent, but, although she was most willing to tell us all she knew, she had no knowledge, it appeared, of the place to which Grace O'Malley had been taken.

"A castle a few miles from Limerick," and no more could we get from her. And Desmond, or the chiefs who regarded him as their prince, had more than one castle answering this description.

The important matter was that Desmond had not at once delivered her over to the President of Munster.

First, he was trying to convince her that his was no empty threat; and, second, to bend or break her spirit. But I knew that, while he might succeed in the one, he never would in the other. And he would see this so soon that I had no doubt whatever that at most not more than two or three days would elapse before she had been lodged in the prison of Limerick, for I was now certain of the complete perfidy of Desmond.

The man who could betray his guest was not likely to be true to any cause. That he had sent Fitzmaurice's letter to the President was, I considered, a thing not only possible, but in the highest degree probable. Thus the prospect on all sides of us was dark indeed.

Sooner or later, then, Grace O'Malley would be in the power of the English, at the mercy of the President of Munster, a helpless captive in Limerick gaol! She might be there already, for aught we knew, and therefore it behoved us at once to endeavour to discover if she were shut up in Limerick.

And, if haply this were the case, what could we do? What could my mistress look for at the hands of the English? How could we assist her? It might even now be too late, and my flesh crept upon my bones at the thought.

"I will go to Limerick," said I, as the result of my reflections; but when we had discussed the matter it appeared to be better that someone else should be sent.

"I am too marked a man," said Burke; and one of his gallowglasses would do as well, for, if Grace O'Malley were in Limerick gaol, there was not a soul in that city who would not know of it, and thus anyone on the spot could easily obtain the knowledge we sought.

I was not persuaded to this course without much difficulty, and Burke himself was most determined at first to go; but there was the same objection in his case that there was in mine. Neither of us could have

been long in the streets of Limerick without being recognised. At length, a messenger was despatched, Burke going out from the tent to tell him what he was to do.

No sooner had Burke left Eva and myself alone together, than my dear fell a-weeping, as if her heart would break, all her wonderful fortitude utterly gone. I took her into my arms—these great, strong arms of mine, now weak and trembling like those of a little child—and tried to soothe her grief. Perhaps my love and our common sorrow taught us what to say, yet I spoke not of love at all. But what I said and what she said about ourselves I cannot put into writing—and I would not, if I could, for there are words and there are times which are sacred beyond expression; and such were those words, and such this time.

She was my love and I was hers; and though we spoke not of it, we both knew, and the knowledge of it folded us about like a garment.

Much, too, had we to say to each other about de Vilela and about Fitzgerald, and how strangely they had passed in and out, out and in, of the woof of our lives. She evidently had a kind of affection for them both, and when I was inclined to question her about this she said that they had both been wounded and helpless, and that she had nursed and tended them, and so had come by this feeling. But ever as our talk came back to Grace O'Malley our hearts were heavy.

The messenger whom the MacWilliam had sent

to Limerick returned in the evening. He had seen and had spoken to many of the inhabitants of that city, and he could hear of nothing which indicated that Grace O'Malley was there. We took courage from this report, hoping that the worst had not come upon her. But the man had something more to tell us.

As he was on his way back from Limerick he had fallen in with a great gathering of armed men, moving on eastward, some three or four miles to the south of the city. These were Spaniards, he declared, and other foreigners, as well as a large number of the Irish. And there were priests with them, and in the midst of them a banner, all blue and gold, with the figure of the Lord upon it.

This could be nothing other than the army of Fitzmaurice, accompanied by Sanders and the standard blessed by the Pope.

I questioned the man narrowly as to the place where he had seen them, and if he had heard where they were going. He replied that one had told him that they were to camp that night on the banks of the river Mulkern, not far from the Slieve Phelim Mountains, and that when he met them they could not have been above two leagues' distance from the ground which had been chosen. Feeling fairly certain that Fitzmaurice would be with them, and, perhaps, de Vilela also, I resolved to set out at once for their camp.

If I saw Fitzmaurice, I would try to find out from him where Grace O'Malley was, and, further, I was

determined to appeal to him to endeavour to prevent Desmond from carrying out his plans. As my mistress had not been taken into Limerick, the probability was that the Earl had not finally broken with Fitzmaurice, and that negotiations were still going on between them. There was, therefore, a chance that Fitzmaurice might prevail upon him to set her at liberty.

"Tell Fitzmaurice," said Richard Burke, when I had informed him of what I proposed, "that unless Grace O'Malley is released immediately, the Burkes of Mayo will take neither part nor lot with the Geraldines in this affair."

This suggested to me a possibility I had not yet contemplated, but I thrust it away from me, telling myself that Burke was too much distraught to know what he was saying. But it kept coming back to my mind, as I rode that night along with a guard of the Burkes towards the Mulkern.

When we were within a few paces of the camp, which we found without any difficulty, we were challenged by a Spanish sentinel. I could not give him password or countersign, and he had raised his piece to his shoulder to fire, when he suddenly dropped it again, saying he remembered my face, having seen me at Limerick and also at Tralee. Having asked him if Sir James Fitzmaurice was here, he replied that he was, as were also the other leaders. When I told him that I had business with Sir James, and when he saw how small was the guard with me, he said he would take it upon himself to

allow me to pass within the lines, although it was contrary to his orders. He therefore directed me, pointing through the camp fires, to the spot where Fitzmaurice's tent had been pitched.

And now I must put on record, as carefully as I can, what passed between Fitzmaurice and myself, so that all men can judge whether Richard Burke, Grace O'Malley's lover, and I, Ruari Macdonald, her servant, were justified in what we afterwards did, or not.

When Fitzmaurice saw me he was unmistakably surprised, for he started violently as I entered his tent. Perhaps he had thought I was still immured at Askeaton, and so out of the way; but that I know not. Besides, when we had last parted it had been in no very friendly fashion. Whatever his feelings now were, he put on a garb of welcome as soon as his first surprise was past.

"Greeting—a thousand greetings!" said he. "You have come to join us? How many men have you brought with you?"

"Greeting!" said I, then I fixed my gaze sternly on him, for if I was right in the opinions I held all words of welcome were out of place between us; and continued, "Sir James, I have not come to join you—not at present, at any rate. That is not the business which brings me here. I have come to ask you if you know where my mistress, Grace O'Malley, is?"

I was in no humour to pick and choose what forms of speech I should use, and I spoke out sharply.

"Sir," said he, frowning, all his cordiality disappearing instantly, "what should I know of your mistress, Grace O'Malley?" And there was a trace of mockery in the way he uttered the last four words.

"Answer me, Sir James," said I again. "Nay, you need not, for I can see that you do know."

"I have heard something," said he, at length.

"Do you know how the matter stands between her and Desmond?" asked I. "Do you know that she was his guest—invited by him to Askeaton? Do you know that she has tried to bind him to the cause? Do you know that he has told her that he has a passion for her, that he holds her as a prisoner in one of his castles because she will not submit to him, and that he has threatened to give her up to the English, and to make common cause with them against you, if she will not yield herself to him?"

Fitzmaurice said nothing, but sat scowling at me, and biting his lip.

"Have you no answer?" asked I. "You say you have heard something; perhaps you knew all this before I left you at Tralee."

Then changing my tone to one almost of entreaty, I said, "Sir James, bethink yourself before it is too late. Nothing but evil can come from these acts of Desmond," and I gave him the message with which Richard Burke had charged me. "Grace O'Malley," I concluded, "must be set free, and that at once. Do you know where she is?"

"Ruari Macdonald!" thundered he with curses, "you always had a proud stomach! Who are you

to speak to me in this fashion? What have I to do with your mistress? What if I do know where she is? What affair of mine is it? Go and seek Desmond."

But he had said enough.

"You know where she is," cried I, wildly. "Tell me, and I will go and find Desmond."

"Ay, and ruin all," said he half to himself. "No, I will not tell you; that would be but to add to the mischief. No! Grace O'Malley must yield to Desmond, and then all will be well."

"Yield to Desmond!" exclaimed I. "She will never do that."

"Ay, but she will be forced to do so," said he, with a horrible smile.

"Never!" said I. "I know her better than you do; she will die rather than submit."

"Then," said he, fiercely, "let her die!"

"Is that your last word?" asked I, furiously.

He rose up at me like an angry beast, and, shaking his outstretched hand at me, shouted, "Curses on you both! Who is your mistress, as you call her, and what is she to stand in the way of a Desmond? Who is she to come between us and the deliverance of Ireland? Shall a woman block up the path—only a woman!" And on he went in his wrath, saying many injurious things of Grace O'Malley, until at last he applied to her the vilest of names.

As his rage swelled, and his language became more and more insulting, I grew calmer, until I was

possessed by a very devil of deadly coldness. But when he used the expression I have hinted at, I could keep my peace no longer.

"You lie!" said I, and out came my sword. Nor was he less ready; and there we stood for a second facing each other, with the candles flickering this way and that between us. Then he thrust his sword back into its sheath, and saying, "What need of this fool's blood!" shouted loudly to someone outside the tent. There was the quick tramp of men, and in came some Spaniards, with de Vilela at their head.

"You here!" cried de Vilela, when he saw me.

"Secure him, bind him," said Fitzmaurice, pointing at me.

De Vilela looked from one to the other of us, his face very grave, but did not stir.

"Bind him! I command you," said Fitzmaurice.

De Vilela stood still.

"What!" shouted Fitzmaurice.

De Vilela said slowly, "May I ask, señor——"

"You may ask nothing," yelled Fitzmaurice.

De Vilela went white to the lips; but he spoke with that habitual courtesy of his, as, pulling out his sword and offering it to Fitzmaurice by the handle, he said—

"I cannot do this thing, for this man is as my brother! I am your prisoner also, señor. Do with me as you will!" Then this loyal gentleman added, turning to the Spanish soldiers, "Long live the King!" and they, too, said, "Long live the King!"

"Take mine!" cried I, holding out my sword to him—so moved out of myself was I.

"Nay; that I cannot do either," said he.

"Are you mad?" asked Fitzmaurice of de Vilela. "You must be mad. Has that woman bewitched you too?" And he wrung his hands.

"Señor," said I to de Vilela, "words have passed between Sir James Fitzmaurice and myself about my mistress that can only be wiped out in one way," and I glanced at my sword.

De Vilela sighed.

"Señor Fitzmaurice will, I am sure, not refuse?" asked the Spaniard, courteous as ever.

"No, I will not refuse," said Fitzmaurice. "All men know me; but it cannot be now."

"Yes," said de Vilela—Fitzmaurice had not taken the proffered sword—"no one will impugn your courage. But if you do not refuse, you will not seek to detain this man?" And he looked searchingly at Fitzmaurice, who did not answer, but curtly nodded assent.

"Go, Señor Ruari!" said de Vilela; but I stood firm.

"Go," said Fitzmaurice. "Do not fear, we shall meet again!"

"To meet again, then," I said, and went out from the tent.

Summoning my men, I returned, darkly brooding over these strange happenings, to the camp of the Burkes. I had failed entirely to compass the object for which I had set out, for I was no nearer knowing

where Desmond had taken my mistress. But Fitzmaurice knew, and when I recalled what he had said my heart overflowed with bitterness.

I would be just to this man, if I could. I can see now, looking across the grave of the years, that he viewed my mistress solely in the light of an obstacle in his path, and so he cared not what her fate was, so long as she was out of the way.

"Only a woman!" he had said of her, and that she was only a woman doubtless increased his sense of injury. But he forgot that it was for "only a woman" that men have ever fought and died.

When I arrived at the camp, Richard Burke was waiting for me. When he had heard me to the end, he said, "You should have killed him!" I had had the same thought myself, but de Vilela and the Spanish soldiers had come too quickly upon the scene for that. Besides, we should meet again, and thus I comforted my soul.

"Let us to sleep," said I.

"I cannot sleep," said he, and I heard him pacing up and down through the rest of what remained of the night, for though I shut my eyes, no sleep came to me either.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS.

I HAVE seen a great swell of the sea, a mountain of a wave—caused by some violent storm which has spent its worst fury many leagues away—roll in from the ocean, lift a ship from her moorings, and dash her to pieces on the rocks.

As I rose in the morning and stepped out of the tent into the dewy freshness of the day, I thought we were not unlike that ship. For I could not disguise from myself that our affairs had suffered shipwreck.

Grace O'Malley was a prisoner, and I was unable to deliver her. I, her servant, was bound before anything else to try to free her from her captivity, and I did not even know where she was; and when I had sought to find it out, it had been with the result that a furious quarrel had sprung up between Fitzmaurice, the leader of the Irish, and myself.

He had not only refused to help me to obtain her liberty, but he had slandered and contemned her to my face. Not under such a man could I or the O'Malleys fight. Nay, there now could be nothing between us but the deadliest feud.

And yet we had all come to Kerry to stand by the side of this man and his Spaniards in the rising against the Queen! That, at least, was now impossible. How

could we support one who had spoken of our mistress and chief as he had done? And the Burkes were in the same position as we ourselves.

As I paced along the ground, Richard Burke, gaunt and hollow-eyed, joined me. Burning with resentment and indignation, he was eager for instant action, and made the wild proposal that I should immediately bring all the men from the galleys, and, having made a junction with him and his forces, march against Fitzmaurice.

At the first blush of the thing I had almost said yes; but a little cool reflection showed me that not only were the odds against us overwhelming, but that, even if we were successful, I should be no nearer my main object, which was the release of Grace O'Malley. So far as I was concerned, all the considerations had to bow to that.

Nor could I readily bring myself in a moment, as it were, into an attitude of hostility to Fitzmaurice, for he represented our cause against the English, and to fight him was, in effect, to help the enemy.

Having told the MacWilliam all that was in my mind, and having won him over to my way of thinking, we considered how we should now proceed. It appeared to me to be best that we should all return to the ships, for the camp of the Burkes, being in the heart of Desmond's country, was very open to attack from the Geraldines, who could no longer be regarded as friends, and so might easily be surprised and taken.

There was also the strong argument that, if any disaster overtook the galleys in our absence, we

should be completely cut off from any way of getting back to Connaught, and our situation would become desperate and well nigh hopeless.

Another reason was that we could, with even greater advantage than from the place where the Burkes were camped, send out from the galleys scouts and spies, with a view to ascertaining where Desmond was.

To that I now bent my whole energy, for I felt sure that so long as Grace O'Malley was not in the gaol of Limerick—if she were, then would she be harder to come at than ever—she would be confined in some castle which the Earl occupied with his forces, and where he would remain until he was convinced that he could neither bend nor break her will. For that, I knew, would be the end.

Having struck our camp, we marched to the westward, so as to avoid Askeaton; then, going to the north, were safely on board the galleys by the evening, having only encountered on our journey several small bands of the Irish on their way to Fitzmaurice, whom we suffered to pass on, having first asked them if they had any information as to where Desmond was. They had been told, it appeared, that the Earl had raised the standard of revolt, and was in camp with Fitzmaurice on the Mulkern. Nor did we undeceive them.

For a week I kept the galleys sailing up and down the Shannon, stopping every mile or two and sending men ashore—sometimes going myself—to speak with the inhabitants; but never a word could we hear of

Desmond, though occasionally we heard of Fitzmaurice, who had not moved from the position he had taken up.

Each evening of that terrible week found me less hopeful and more despondent; in truth, I would have despaired had it not been for the constant solace of Eva, who seemed to have changed herself into another person, so brave and steadfast was she.

Hitherto I had kept well away from Limerick, but now I resolved to bring the galleys as close up to the walls of the city as I dared. Limerick was a great and strongly fortified place, and, therefore, to be avoided by us; but it was the centre of all that part of Ireland, and there might be opportunities in its neighbourhood of hearing more fully what was going forward. I was encouraged to do this, also, by the fact that there were singularly few ships in the river—no doubt owing to the presence of the Spaniards in the country.

When we were yet perhaps a league from the walls we saw a small boat with a sail coming towards us. I looked keenly at her, and even as I looked at her she was suddenly put about, and was headed back for the city, for they evidently did not like our appearance.

Two of the men in her seemed to be soldiers, and I signalled Tibbot, whose galley was leading, to capture her—which he did after a short chase, the occupants of the boat surrendering without any resistance.

I had the two soldiers, as they proved to be,

brought on board of *The Cross of Blood*, and having assured them that I intended them no harm, asked how matters stood in the city. The first words they uttered were enough to stun me.

"Grace O'Malley," said one of them, "was brought into Limerick yesterday, and delivered up to Sir Nicholas Malby."

"Grace O'Malley in Limerick," I cried, "and Sir Nicholas Malby there also!"

The fatality of the thing completely broke down my control, and I could not speak for some minutes. I had somehow felt all along that my mistress would be given up to the English by Desmond, but to be told that this had actually come to pass was none the less a crushing blow. And to Sir Nicholas Malby, the Colonel of Connaught, our implacable foe!

The two men gazed at me curiously, seeing how overcome I was.

"How comes Sir Nicholas Malby to be in Limerick?" I asked, pulling myself together. Connaught is his government, not Munster; how does he happen to be here?"

"You surely must know," said the man who had spoken before, "that Sir James Fitzmaurice, one of the Desmonds, has arrived in the country at the head of a large army from Spain, and that the Irish people are flocking in to him from all quarters?"

"Yes," said I, shortly, "I know all that."

"Sir Nicholas Malby was summoned by the President of Munster," said the soldier, "in hot haste to the defence of Limerick. We were in garrison at the

time at Athlone, several hundred of us, and Sir Nicholas, having marshalled us in our companies, immediately set off in response down the Shannon, and two days ago we arrived here. The President is terror-stricken, and the whole city trembles with fear."

"How came you to be without the walls?" I asked. "And at such a time?"

"We were trying to escape," said the man, "for we heard that the city would soon be taken by the Spaniards, of whom there are thousands, and that everyone of us would be tortured and slain by them."

"Is the Earl of Desmond in Limerick?" I next inquired—noting, however, how the number of Fitzmaurice's men had been exaggerated.

"No," replied the man. "He sent Grace O'Malley bound in chains into the city to Sir Nicholas Malby, but he came not himself. 'Tis said that he will neither join the Spaniards, nor yet assist us, but holds himself aloof from both until he sees on whose side fortune will declare itself."

And this reed of rottenness, this catspaw of the wind, was the man whom my mistress, led on by the memories of the past greatness of the house of Desmond, and by the hope that under him the Irish might unite, had called our natural leader!

It had been the noble dream of a noble soul, that vision of hers; but, like many another noble dream, it was woven around a man incapable of filling the part he was called upon to play, and so was nothing but a dream.

The folly and wickedness of Desmond seemed to me to be almost inconceivable. Baulked by the firmness of my mistress, he had wreaked his wrath upon her by handing her over to the one man in all Ireland who might be supposed to regard her capture with the utmost joy, and who would take a fiendish delight in torturing her.

Having gratified his hatred of her—for such his love no doubt had become—the Earl sought to stand in with both sides in the approaching struggle by coming out openly on behalf of neither. It needed not that one should be a prophet to forecast that Desmond would fall and be crushed between the two.

While such thoughts passed rapidly through my mind, the chief thing which I had just been told—that Grace O'Malley was immured in the gaol of Limerick—threw everything else into the shade. In the hope that the men might have heard what had occurred to her after her arrival in Limerick, I asked them :

“Do you know, or did you hear, what Sir Nicholas Malby did in respect of Grace O'Malley, after she had been delivered up to him?”

“I was one of his guard,” said the man who acted as spokesman for the twain, “when she was brought before him. Sir Nicholas eyed her with great sternness; albeit it was easy to see that he was well-pleased to have her in his power, for she had wrought the English terrible injuries in Galway, and had set him at defiance. However, she did not

quail nor humble herself, but bore herself like a princess, as, they say, she is."

"What said Sir Nicholas?" asked I.

"He demanded of her many things," replied the man, "but she would answer him not at all. Whereupon he was enraged against her, and gave orders that the city gallows should be got ready forthwith, and that she should be hanged immediately."

"Did she not speak even then?"

"No. She looked at him very calmly and tranquilly, like one, indeed, who had already tasted of the bitterness of death and had no fear of it. A strange woman, and a brave! But 'tis said she is a witch."

"What happened after that?"

"We were leading her away to the square in which the gibbet stands, when Sir Nicholas called to us to come back, for he had changed his mind, as it now appeared. Said he to her, 'You will not dance in the air to-day, mistress, but I shall take good care that you dance not out of Limerick as you did out of Galway!' But to what he alluded when he said that I know not. Thereafter she was cast into one of the dungeons of the place."

"One of the dungeons?" asked I.

"Yes—there are several deep, dark dungeons below the gaol of Limerick, and she was thrust into one of these."

I had heard enough, and having sent the two soldiers away in charge of some of my men, I went

and told Richard Burke the evil tidings. Up to this moment he must have cherished the hope that Grace O'Malley would in some way or other escape, for he was utterly unmanned on hearing where and in whose hands she was, and abandoned himself to the wildest grief. The very colour of his face showed that he already regarded her as one dead. As for myself, there had grown upon me a kind of coldness, and an icy numbness, as it were, which seemed to have killed all feeling within me for the time.

And perhaps it was well that this was the case, else I should never have been able to carry the news to Eva. Yet she must be told, and tell her I did.

"So long as she is alive," exclaimed Eva, when I had come to the end of my tale, "there is hope. I will not believe that it is her destiny to perish in this manner!"

What had become of the timid, shrinking girl? For my dear was transformed altogether, being now full of courage, and of purpose and determination.

"Remember," said she, "what Sir Nicholas is; how greedy of money he is, how avaricious! Think you he would not sell Grace O'Malley for gold? Only offer him enough, and he will set her free."

I thought of the immense treasure which lay in the Caves of Silence under the Hill of Sorrow, and for a minute I considered that Eva's suggestion might avail us. But the caves were far away from Limerick, and to go thither was out of the question.

Besides, the English rule was too seriously threatened to permit Sir Nicholas to be moved at this time by bribes, however rich they were. If he opened his hands, liberating Grace O'Malley with his right, and taking her gold with his left, it would not be now: the situation of the English was far too perilous for that.

All this I saw with perfect clearness, and when I spoke to Eva of it, she was at first inclined to fly out at me, and to reproach me for my apathy. Yet, God wot, it was not apathy; I simply could not see any way out for us, or, rather, for our mistress, no matter in what direction I looked. All that I could think of was that I should get into Limerick under some disguise, and then endeavour to find the means of effecting her escape.

When I mentioned this to Eva, she replied that to carry out such a plan would, or might, involve too long a delay, for our mistress, being already condemned, might be executed at any moment. This was true; but, as I could not conceive of any other scheme, I resolved to set about undertaking it, and that no later than next day.

That night my sleep was troubled and uneasy, and I tossed restlessly about, so that when the first light of day was seen I sprang from my couch. As I did so I heard Calvagh O'Halloran call my name loudly, and at the same instant there was the sound of oars; then Calvagh, as I stepped on deck, came running towards me, crying something I could not quite distinguish, and pointing to *The Grey Wolf*,

which had slipped her anchor, and was now being rowed away from us in the direction of Limerick.

All this came upon me so suddenly that I could scarcely grasp the meaning of it, until I noticed Eva O'Malley standing on the poop of *The Grey Wolf*, and waving her hand to me in farewell.

"Stop! stop!" I cried; but on went the galley at racing speed. "Stop! stop!" I cried again; but received no other response than that given by those waving hands. I was on the point of ordering Calvagh to get *The Cross of Blood* under weigh, when I observed that Eva had sent Art O'Malley by one of the small boats of *The Grey Wolf* to my galley with a message for me.

"What is this? What is this?" I asked of him.

"Eva O'Malley bids me tell you," replied he, "that she is going in to Limerick to see Sir Nicholas Malby."

"What?" I cried. "Has she gone crazed! To see Nicholas Malby! What frenzy is this?"

"'Tis no frenzy, Ruari Macdonald," said Art O'Malley, "but her settled will. And she bade me say that you must wait here, and she will return to-night, or else, if she come not, that we must all go to Limerick to-morrow."

"What is her intention?"

"That I know not. It was not till I was in the boat that she gave me these words for you, and none of us imagined, when the galley set out, that you were not aware of what she was about."

I looked at the man in wonder.

"Have you no suspicion at all of what she would be at?"

"To see Sir Nicholas Malby—as she said; I know no more."

In the circumstances there was nothing left me to do but to wait and wonder, to wonder and to wait.

What interpretation was I to put on this extraordinary, this rash act of Eva's? Did she think she would be able to bribe Sir Nicholas? Was that her idea? Or did she have some other plan?

But all these surmises were powerless to console me; and it was with a gladness of heart to which I had long been a stranger that I saw *The Grey Wolf* come up alongside of us in the afternoon.

And who was that who stood by the side of my dear on the poop-deck? Richard Burke was with me, and I cried to him to look.

"Who is that?" asked I, astounded, doubting if my eyes did not juggle with me.

"You may well ask," said he. "Some miracle must have come to pass!"

"Then 'tis he!" I cried.

"Sir Nicholas Malby himself," said Burke, and his face was instantly lighted up with a new hope rising in his breast.

"Ay, 'tis Sir Nicholas!" cried I. "By God's wounds, this is a strange thing!"

There they stood together—the Colonel of Connaught and Eva O'Malley. Like Burke, my heart

grew light, as if a great weight had been taken from me, for I knew that Malby must have some proposal to make us which must be to our advantage, otherwise he would never thus have ventured to come.

If he was not exactly alone, he had apparently but few of his soldiers with him; and evidently, therefore, he was determined to show us that whatever it was he was to offer us was offered to men in whom he had implicit faith.

And what had Eva said, what promised, what undertaken for us? How had she managed to bring him? What had this little weak woman, who could yet be so great and strong, done?

And I still glow with a pride in her that is too deep and too high for words when I think of it all. Surely, it was nothing but a miracle, as Burke had said. One thing, at least, was now certain, and that was that Grace O'Malley was alive, or Malby would not have come to us.

The Grey Wolf having dropped her anchor, Eva and Sir Nicholas immediately made signs to Richard Burke and me to go over to them, and we hastened to comply with their wish. As we approached, Sir Nicholas saluted us both very courteously, and we bowed low in return. Eva was the first to speak.

"I went this morning to Sir Nicholas," said Eva; "I was detained at the water gate, but——"

"You are a brave as well as a beautiful woman," said he, interrupting her, "and I regret that there was any delay at the gate."

"It would have been singular," replied she, smiling, "if there had not been some opposition. However, having stated who I was, I prevailed after some time upon the captain of the watch to send me to Sir Nicholas. I wished to see if Sir Nicholas utterly refused to accept a ransom for our mistress."

"Yes," said I, eagerly. "We will pay it gladly."

"He refused to receive a ransom, however," said Eva.

"Then——" asked I.

"He had better tell you himself what he proposes," said she. "He asked me if I thought you would agree, and knowing how you and the MacWilliam now feel with respect to Sir James Fitzmaurice, I answered that I deemed it probable enough. He next wished to know how he was to convince you of his sincerity, and I suggested his coming with me as a proof of it. But that I have passed my word to him, pledging you and Richard Burke also to his safety, he is in our hands."

"I will be frank with you," said Sir Nicholas, bluntly, "and not waste words. You wish to free your mistress, and you have a quarrel with Sir James Fitzmaurice so that you no longer can fight by his side against us. If you and the MacWilliam will join your men to mine, I will not only set Grace O'Malley at liberty, but will confirm her in possession of her estates in the Queen's name, and also grant what I know she desires in respect of her ships." Sir Nicholas paused, eyeing us narrowly.

"The MacWilliam and I are proclaimed rebels," said I.

"Come to the aid of her Highness," said he, "and you will be rebels no longer." Then, as he saw that we both were silent, he said—and here he touched us to the quick—"Have you no desire to be avenged on Fitzmaurice and the Desmonds?"

"Ay, by the Mass, yes," cried Burke.

"What say you, Ruari Macdonald?" asked Sir Nicholas.

"Tell me first," said I, "how stands Desmond in this matter?"

"He has gone to Askeaton again," said he, "and as he will not declare himself for the Queen, he must be judged to be against her."

"Did you say anything to Grace O'Malley of this errand of yours to us? Does she know of it?" asked I.

"Yes," said he.

"And what is her word to us?"

"'Bid these men of mine avenge me, and that right speedily.' That was what she said."

"Well spoken!" cried Richard Burke.

"I have never disobeyed her yet," said I, "and I shall not do so now."

CHAPTER XXIV.

BARRINGTON BRIDGE.

As we four stood facing each other on the poop of *The Grey Wolf*, there was the sound of a door opened and closed, and then the pit-pat of steps on the deck, and well did I know who it was.

"Grace O'Malley!" cried I joyously, turning towards her.

"Grace O'Malley!" said Richard Burke, and could not say more for very gladness.

My mistress smiled upon us, as she gave one hand to the MacWilliam and the other to me; but as I gazed upon her I saw that those great eyes of hers were deep-shadowed with sadness. And well could I understand how the failure and defeat of her most cherished hopes, brought about by the perfidy of Desmond, and acquiesced in by Fitzmaurice, preyed upon her mind and filled her with gloom. What she now said to me showed how her thoughts ran.

"So you are become a Queen's man, Ruari!"

"I am your servant, Grace O'Malley," said I. "What care I whose man I am, so long as I am yours! If you say be a Queen's man, then Queen's man am I."

"And you, Richard Burke?" she asked.

"You well know what I would say!" answered he,

"It is well," said she; but if she had said, "It is ill," her accents could hardly have been more sober or less exultant. And for myself, when I recalled the image of de Vilela, who must henceforth be our foe, and all that I owed him, I could not but share in and sympathise with her feelings.

Sir Nicholas Malby, perhaps guessing something of what we were thinking, and anxious to reap the fullest benefit as soon as possible from our alliance with him, brought the conversation sharply round to Fitzmaurice and the Geraldines.

He was enough of a tactician to say very little of the past or of the Spaniards; only he harped incessantly on the baseness with which our mistress had been treated by her own countrymen, and so wrought upon our desire for revenge.

"Here and now is your opportunity! There is no time to be thrown away. Each day sees Fitzmaurice in a stronger position, as men pour into his camp from all directions. Desmond, meanwhile, like the weakling he is, still hesitates. If we are to succeed, the blow must be struck at once—should he join Fitzmaurice, I may have to wait till soldiers come from England; if we move at once, however, though the enemy is more numerous than our combined forces, we are, I believe, a match for them."

"Tell us your plans," said Richard Burke, and thereupon Sir Nicholas began to discuss with us what course was to be pursued.

He appeared to be well-informed of all that was going on in the camp of Fitzmaurice, and was

determined to offer him battle at once. With this end in view, we agreed to move up the galleys that very afternoon to Limerick, and anchor them in the harbour within its walls.

It was not without misgivings that I consented to this, for then we should be indeed at the mercy of Sir Nicholas; but he was so fair and open with us, and had so placed himself, without reserve, as it were, in our hands, that I gave way; nor, as the event showed, was our trust misplaced.

I returned to *The Cross of Blood*, and in a very few minutes, the three galleys were on their way to Limerick, where their appearance shortly afterwards created no small stir among its inhabitants.

Thinking that Grace O'Malley and Eva would prefer being left together, I had taken Sir Nicholas on board of my ship; and he and Burke and I considered the situation of affairs, and resolved that next morning we should all march out from Limerick and engage Fitzmaurice. Sir Nicholas estimated our whole force at a thousand men, most of whom were hardened soldiers and veterans of war, nor did he anticipate that we should meet with any strenuous resistance, save from the Spanish troops, who would be certain to fight desperately.

One favour I asked of Sir Nicholas, and only one. I told him that there was amongst the Spaniards a gentleman—a certain de Vilela—to whom I was beholden by the greatest of obligations, and I begged of him this boon—if it should be the fortune of war that Don Francisco were taken alive, then that he

should be given up to me upon my paying such a ransom as would satisfy the captors. And to this Sir Nicholas very willingly consented.

After we had come into port, and the galleys were made fast to the quay, Sir Nicholas went on into the city to give orders with respect to his soldiers and to prepare for the morrow. But, ere he left us, he said he would either come himself to see me late that night to give us his final commands, or would send one of his chief captains in his place.

As I watched that sturdy figure of his, I recalled that when I had last talked with him it was on the night of the revel in Galway, and could not but marvel at the strange dance both he and I had been led by fate since that time.

Also I did not fail to reflect that, while Sir Nicholas had spoken confidently of our ability to cope with the enemy, he must have deemed his position to be critical in the extreme, or he never would have made terms with us. Nothing but the stern compulsion of necessity could have forced him to act as he had done—nothing else, indeed, could have justified him.

I was sure, being acquainted with the nature of the man, that it would have been more congenial to him to have fought us, as well as Fitzmaurice. Being placed, however, as he was, he had seen, with the quickness and shrewdness of a man well versed in affairs, how he could make use of the division between us and Fitzmaurice, and turn it to his profit and the service of the Queen.

His need of us must have been very great for him not only to have to relinquish the vengeance he had vowed against my mistress and myself, but also to ask for our aid. But would our assistance suffice ?

My heart beat fast and quickly as I thought that the morrow's battle might have a very different result from that which he expected. To say the least, our victory was very uncertain, seeing that our combined forces were probably far outnumbered by those of Fitzmaurice.

After I had spent an hour or two musing in this fashion, I saw Eva appear on the deck of *The Grey Wolf*. All my doubt of the issue of the morrow vanished immediately, and a swelling tide of love and tenderness swept over me as I beheld my dear. In truth, I had loved her all my life ; but there was now mingled with my love a feeling that was close akin to worship, for what had not she dared ?

Thank God, I say again, for the great hearts of women !

She did not at once perceive me, and I observed from the pensive droop of her head and of her body that she was weary. There was now nought between us— but a few feet of water ; and I quickly made my way to her side. She greeted me with a radiant smile, and love's own light was shining in her soft eyes.

“ Ruari ! ”

And love, too, was in her voice.

Long did we hold sweet converse together, saying such fond things to each other as lovers say ; but it is not for me to set them forth.

When I asked her what had put it into her mind to go to Sir Nicholas Malby, she replied that after the conversation we had had, in which she had suggested offering a large sum to him as a ransom for Grace O'Malley—a notion which I had scouted—she had pondered the matter, and had resolved, without informing me of her intention, to endeavour to gain admittance to Sir Nicholas, and to tell him that he had only to name what amount of treasure he required to purchase our mistress's liberty, and it would be given.

"I felt an irresistible impulse," said Eva, "and it was so strong upon me that I could get no rest until I had seen Sir Nicholas."

"Did Sir Nicholas receive you well?"

"Yes, indeed," said Eva. "He was disposed to regard my appearance as most fortunate, for he had already been casting about for some means of communicating with you and the MacWilliam."

And here our talk was interrupted by the sharp ringing of the hoofs of horses upon the stones of the quay, the clank of arms, and shouted words of command.

"Sir Nicholas again!" cried I, and we went forward to meet him.

"All is well," said he briefly, but briskly. "I wish you to disembark your men——" and here he stopped; "but where is Richard Burke?"

"He is with Grace O'Malley," said Eva.

Sir Nicholas stood for an instant lost in thought.

"Rumours have reached us," said he, at length, "that the MacWilliam is greatly desirous of allying

himself with Grace O'Malley more nearly than as a mere comrade and friend in war."

His words were a question, and I could almost have sworn there was a twinkle in those fierce eyes of his.

"Yes, that is true," I answered, seeing no need for any equivocation or denial.

"It would be no bad thing," said he, "for after what has passed they will surely be loyal to her Highness."

"Yes," said I, somewhat drily, "but that will also depend upon her Highness."

"Her Highness," cried he, "can mean nothing but good to this her realm of Ireland. Peace and quiet are essential to its prosperity, and these she will have, and so, by God, shall I."

"Let us go and see them," said I; for what he had said seemed to me very like halloaing before we were out of the wood, as it were.

When we entered the cabin, I saw at once that my mistress had recovered something of her usual spirits, while Richard Burke's honest face was bright with happiness. It needed no voice to tell me that he had again made suit to her, and that she had not repulsed him.

And so best, thought I.

But there was a stern business before us, for we must win our way to the hands of our brides across a field of blood.

Sir Nicholas began at once to tell us what he had arranged with respect to us and his English troops.

At dawn we were all to cross the Shannon, and, plunging into the forest, march upon the camp of Fitzmaurice. He trusted that he might come upon Sir James unawares, or, at any rate, before he had had time to make the best disposition of his men.

When all these matters had been settled between us, we bade Grace O'Malley and Eva farewell.

"Wear this," said Grace O'Malley, on parting, to Richard Burke, taking a ring from her finger and putting it into his hand, "and wear it for my sake."

As for myself, I had secretly possessed myself of a silken riband of Eva's, and twined it about the guard of my sword. That was guerdon enough for me until I should return to claim her.

"Victory!" cried my mistress to me.

"Amen and amen to that!" said Sir Nicholas and we all, in a breath.

Then we went, each one to his place, and the darkness covered us all till morning came.

In the twilight of the dawn we assembled to the sound of trumpets, and then were rapidly carried across the river to its south side, landing about two miles east of Limerick.

The troops of Sir Nicholas were composed of Englishmen and of Irishmen too, though these were chiefly from the Pale; all men who had taken part in many a fight, and gloried in nothing so much as in the red riot of war. Two hundred of them were mounted, and a hundred, or perhaps more, bore arquebuses upon their shoulders. But the major portion of them were armed with long pikes, and

nearly all had swords or daggers. The Burkes and the O'Malleys had the Irish sword and the stabbing poniard and the still more terrible battle-axe.

The men on horseback went first; then the MacWilliam and I with our men, followed by the soldiers with arquebuses; last of all, Sir Nicholas and his pike-men.

Such was the order of our march until we were within half a mile of the outposts of Fitzmaurice's camp. But already his spies had warned him of our approach, and we could hear, even at that distance, the noise of the commotion among his forces as they prepared to receive us.

We now advanced more slowly, throwing out single soldiers here and there among the trees, while the mounted men were halted.

The main body was massed together as closely as the nature of the ground would permit, Sir Nicholas himself directing all our movements with the utmost coolness and unconcern.

As we pressed onward there was a sharp crack of an arquebus, then another and another, until the air was full of the sounds of firing; and then the men who had been sent forward fell back, crying that the Spaniards were drawn up in battle array, and were waiting to fall upon us so soon as we came near. Before we emerged from the forest into the open Sir Nicholas brought up his arquebusiers, bidding Burke and myself to support them. At the same time he ordered his mounted men to the front.

When we burst out from among the trees we were

met by a hail of bullets from the pieces of the Spaniards, and a cloud of whirling arrows seemed to form and break over our heads. For a time we were thrown back, but returning, like a wave flinging itself upon the shore, rushed furiously on the enemy, the arquebusiers of Sir Nicholas meanwhile pouring a deadly fire in upon the ranks of Fitzmaurice.

There was the sudden hoarse blare of a trumpet, the strident voice of Sir Nicholas crying on us to charge, and our horsemen threw themselves madly upon the foe, who sullenly gave way before them, but only to form up quickly again. The men opposed to them were neither cowards nor strangers to the art of war; they were rallied speedily by their captains, and soon presented a new front to our attack.

The air was so darkened by smoke, and there was such a tumult from the shoutings of the soldiers and the clang and clamour of their weapons and all the wild work of war, that it was some time before I could make out de Vilela among the Spaniards. But there he was, his long sword gleaming in his hand, his lips moving, and, though I could not hear what he was saying, I could well imagine that he was exhorting his men to remember Spain, and to acquit themselves as became her sons. Then, as the battle raged, now here, now there, he passed out of my sight.

It is a soldier's duty to do what his general bids him; but I was glad when Sir Nicholas called upon Burke and myself to lead our people against that part of Fitzmaurice's army which was chiefly made up of

the Geraldines, and which was commanded by Sir James himself. Sir Nicholas rightly judged that our animosity would burn more fiercely against them than against the Spaniards, and we sprang upon them with a fury they could not long withstand.

At the first onset they met us bravely, and for awhile there was much fierce and terrible fighting. Above their hosts there rose the Pope's banner of blue and gold, and around it and Sanders, who held it, and his priests, they made a stubborn resistance. But they were forced back, and ever back.

I strove to come at Fitzmaurice, but could not for the press. We had a score to settle, and settled it was, but not by me, for it was Burke who dealt him the fatal blow. I had just parried the cunning thrust of a sword, as I was trying to reach Fitzmaurice, when I saw the flash of a pistol in Burke's hand, and then Sir James swayed and fell forward from his horse. When the Geraldines knew what had taken place, they turned and fled, bearing Sanders and his banner along with them, into the thickesses of the forest.

Having witnessed the defeat and flight of their Irish allies, the Spaniards could not but be aware that they had small chance of retrieving the fortunes of the day, and they now began to retreat. Attacked on the flanks as well as in the front, they were thrown into disorder, and their retreat became a rout, each man striving to save himself. A few, however, stood their ground to the last, and among them was de Vilela.

"Take him alive!" I shouted; but the words came too late.

I was almost beside him, for I had hoped that he would surrender to me if I asked him to do so, and with that purpose had fought my way even through the English to get near him; but before I reached him he had fallen, his armour all stained with blood, and his sword broken in his hand.

With a great, wild cry of grief, the sharpness of which was like the sundering of my spirit from my body, I threw my sword upon the ground, and, kneeling beside him, called to him to speak to me if he were yet alive. His hand feebly pressed mine, while I wept and sobbed like a little child. The lips trembled and opened; the half-shut eyelids faintly quivered; but he could not speak. Again, however, my hand was feebly pressed. And so he passed—still with his hand in mine—this noble gentleman of Spain.

Nor does there go by a day when I do not think of de Vilela, the man to whom I owed so much—so much that I can never repay.

It was the custom in these wars of ours to cut off the heads of the principal men among our fallen enemies; this the body of Sir James Fitzmaurice suffered, the head being sent to Dublin, where it was tarred, and put on a spike above the Castle gate.

But no such indignity befell the body of de Vilela, for, having obtained permission from Sir Nicholas, I took my men, made a solemn mourning for him, and

buried him on the field of battle, where the waters of the Mulkern go murmuring past; and there he lies, that true and noble gentleman, in a grave without a name.

* * * * *

And thus ended the battle of Barrington Bridge, as it is called, entailing with it the overthrow and collapse of the rising, for the death of Fitzmaurice—although the war lingered on for long afterwards—was the death of any chance of success it had.

Desmond, who had been hanging about in the vicinity during the battle, but had taken no part in it, later met with an inglorious end, and with him perished his house.

As for Richard Burke and myself, we accompanied Sir Nicholas Malby and his army in various expeditions, until the beginning of the winter, when he set out overland to Galway, and we sailed from Limerick the same day in our ships for that city also. Heaven sent us fair and gentle gales—perhaps, to make up for all the storms through which we had passed—and we came safely into the port of Galway where we lay several days waiting for Sir Nicholas; for, at his particular request, we—Grace O'Malley and the MacWilliam, and Eva and I—were to be married in the church of St. Nicholas of Myra.

And I had heard that when these events came to pass, there were among the spectators many who loved us and wished us well, and many who did not; but to which of these classes Sir Nicholas really

belonged I know not, for, in the years that came after, he and Grace O'Malley and her husband, Richard Burke, had many disputes, and the "Queen's peace" was often broken.

As for myself and Eva, we sailed away from Ireland to my old home in Isla, where I was chosen chief in the room of my uncle, who had succeeded my father, and who was now dead. It was in *The Cross of Blood*—Grace O'Malley's last gift to me—that we made our journey, and that I returned to these isles of Scotland.

Many years have passed since, and in our life there has been winter as well as summer; but still there is the same light in Eva's eyes, and the same love in her voice. It has been our happy lot to grow old together—to grow old in our love for each other, though that love itself is as fresh and new as the flowers of the first mornings of summer.

And so we await the inevitable end.





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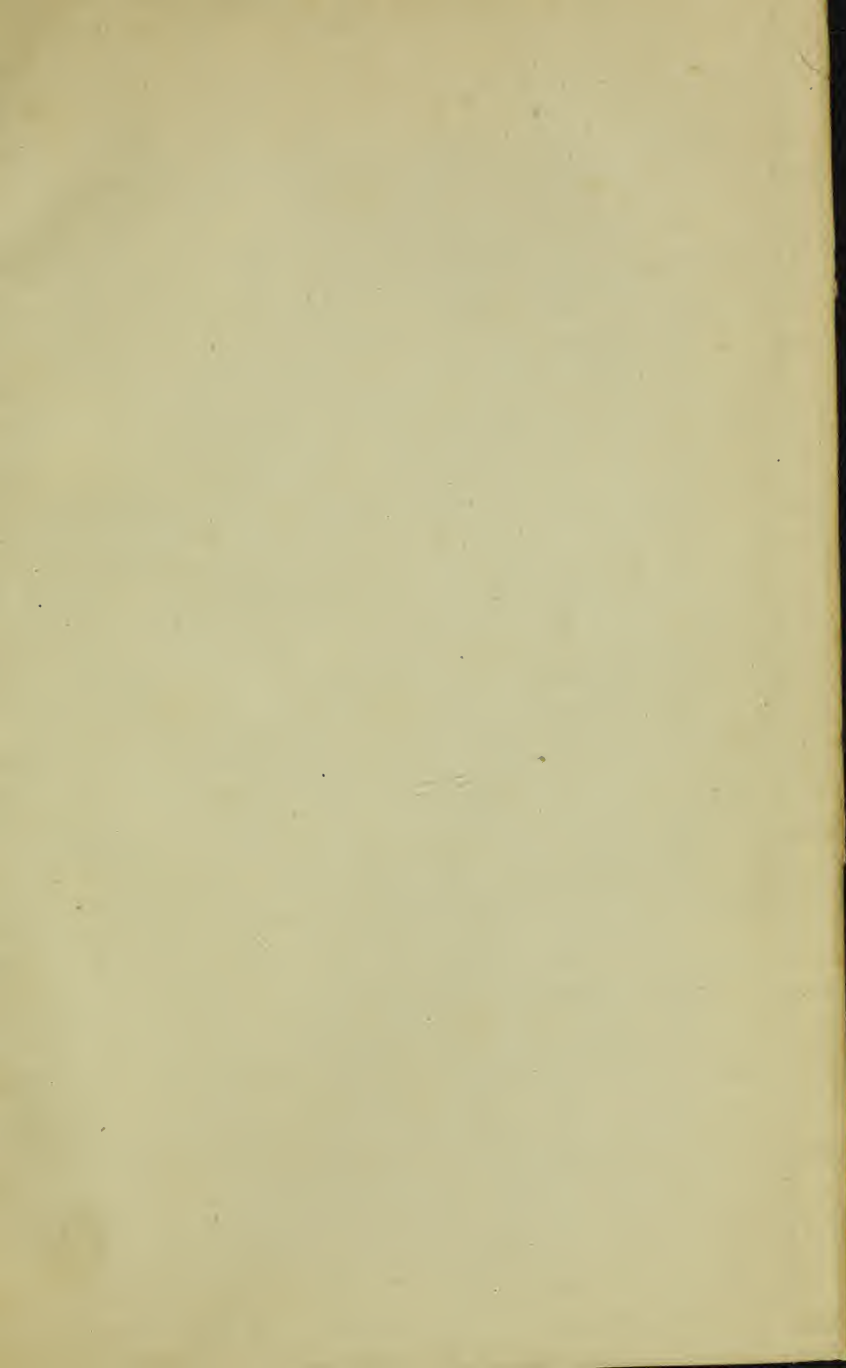
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